Cardiac Arrest

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/15134645.

Rating:
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Category:
Gen

Fandom:
僕のヒーローアカデミア | Boku no Hero Academia | My Hero Academia

Character:
Midoriya Izuku, Yagi Toshinori | All Might, Bakugou Katsuki, Sensei | All For One, Midoriya Inko, Tsukauchi Naomasa, Iida Tenya, Todoroki Shouto, Yaoyorozu Momo, Shigaraki Tomura | Shimura Tenko, Kurogiri (My Hero Academia), Kirishima Eijirou

Additional Tags:
Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence

Language:
English

Series:
Part 3 of Wok For All

Collections:
The Last Rec List, best fic collection ever read, MoonPaw's Hoard of Dad for One Fics, Stories that really butter my bread, I Sorted Through Shit And Found Gold, Behold the Sacred Texts, Storycatchers' pile of heroic hero stuff, Works Loved By Luna04, There are no words for this beauty, Got 99 problems but these ain't one, Genius bnha fanfics, The Collection From the Clouds, The Unitary, Sven's Absolute Top Fics, the perfect fic doesn't exi-, Red's Recced BNHA Fics, Legendary Good Fics, Unfinished_best_bnha, Rain Recs, My Favourite Fanfics, Sturgeon's Fuck You, fics I want to read soon tsukkikay, ScribeSmith's BNHA Fanfic Library (AKA: Izuku is Best Boi), Void's BNHA Favorites :D, nonsense station's discord recs!, Surprise! It’s Trauma!, In-Progress I Want To Read,

Love these so much Must not misplace Would cry if these disappear, passes MY vibe check!, The Timelesses, Feeeeelings, Hella cool fics, Mha Fanfics to read when done, great reads, Skelebooks (The Graveyard), gothelixar recs, BaNHAmmer, Most favorite works (GoSleep_NoThatSoInteresting), Bnha fics I don't want to loose, Worth It BNHA Fanfics Reading List - Ongoing, unfinished, ☆My Hero Stories Worth Your Time☆, My Hero Academia Decent Enough, My_hero_academia_works, McNanas' Recommends, Fics that Prove Fanfic is an Art, Elite_Izuku_Centric_Fic_Recs, My Hero Academia Fics To Cleanse Your Soul ♨, Days' best bnha finds 🔥, The best fics, Alina'sfavoritebnhafics!, Love these stuff UwU, Bonkas Absolute Must Reads, Jaded Discord Server Recommendations, soul healing comes from fanfiction, The Eternal Crack Server Fic Rec Collection, The Collossally Curious Collection of Carefully Curated Stories, Dkn, Discord Fics From Network Error, CataRaen's Favorite Library, The same fanfictions in which AFO really creates the feeling of DFO vibe, I Read This Instead of Sleeping, The 👌Fairest 👌 of Them All, Nicee, My Favorite MHA Fanfics, BNHA Fics that cured my cancer, my hero academy <3, MHA Favs, Fanfics merecedoras de Kudos, Seriously good fics, snowwy's list of best BNHA fics, quality fics I can't believe cost $0 to read, Great long works, Izu's other Dads (TiaLee), comfort fics for sad fucks like me, For Izuku

Stats:

Published: 2018-07-02 Completed: 2022-12-31 Words: 190,847 Chapters: 30/30

Cardiac Arrest

by AMournfulHowlInTheNight

Summary

All of the dead at Kamino Ward had been accounted for, sans one. One body had been pulled from the rubble, lifeless and limp, and taken away.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

Arrest

Too slow.

Katsuki was too fucking slow. Too weak. It happened so fast.

Deku saw it first. Like he seems to have heard that prick first from what he said. He was always on edge. Made sense he saw it first. Saw it coming. The debris coming from All Might and All For One's fight. They thought they were safe. Deku knew that was bullshit.

Deku was smiling when he threw them out the way. Serenely too. Katsuki would almost call it zen as he tumbled away. Deku had to know. Had to. And he was fucking smiling like a moron. Smiling while the world ended. And Katsuki couldn't do shit, too taken aback like the fucking idiot he was to lunge forward and grab the idiot and pull him with them.

But he didn't. He didn't.

Then the rubble came down and Deku was fucking gone. Buried. Disappeared in an instant in a mountain of fuck knows what shit. Rebar and concrete and glass that rained down from fuck knows where. From All For One's pressure blasts probably. Katsuki didn't fucking know where it came from, but All Might agreed with him later on. That fucking prick All For One dropping those things where ever the fuck he felt like.

Dropping the ruin directly on *them*.

That wasn't the worst part though. Not the realisation of what happened, or the cloud of concrete dust and glass or the screams or blood or the carpet of bodies or that Katsuki couldn't feel one of his arms.

No, it was the fucking miasma that Katsuki had only just escaped from. The one that followed them here.

It was the air thickening into fully fledged hysteria as All For One stepped out of thin air to the base of the mountain of rubble, a fist clenched. Completely indifferent to the screams, to the misery, to the fact that All Might was moments away from coming to smash his face in again. The disregard… It was the careful footsteps and

positioning…

Katsuki couldn't do anything, struggling to breathe, when a moment later a blast sheared through the rubble as though it were made of fucking paper. It was all he could to hold onto the ground that recoil shot through, when an undisturbed All For One's probing tentacles rushed the resulting destruction as the second set batted away obstructions deeper within.

Then they retracted and there was Deku wrapped in them. At least Katsuki thought it was Deku, the mop of green hair tinted red with blood and shredded clothing made him nearly unrecognisable by the impact. But Deku had been standing there when it hit… but why the fuck was All For One there? All For One should have been after All Might?

But no, that was definitely All For One… who lifted Deku into his arms, showing Deku's unblinking staring features and subsequently ran a hand down them. With Deku's eyes closed, All For One vanished.

There was no sign of the warp that caught Katsuki having caught Deku. None of the black goo... As if… as if it didn't need to…

It happened so fast.

And Katsuki couldn't do anything.

Toshinori hadn't thought anything of the blast All For One had used as a partial deflection. Not until All For One had literally vanished a split second later, leaving the League of Villains gaping at empty air.

"Sensei!" Shigaraki called pathetically and Toshinori would have gone over and punted him into a free standing sign if he didn't have more important things to worry about. Namely wherever the hell All For One had gone.

"Where the hell is he?" Toshinori demanded from Gran Torino

"He must have warped!" Gran Torino coughed.

“All Might! He’s near the train station!” Someone called and Toshinori prepared to leap.

“You get the rest of the League!” Toshinori called as he bounded up into the air, feeling One For All strain as he did so. He was already running on fumes… but for All For One to bail so suddenly. What had happened? Was he too reaching his limit?

Whatever he was expecting on arrival… it wasn’t this…

All For One was nowhere to be seen. Not him directly, nor his aura of menace. The train station had been obliterated. All For One’s line of destruction through the city ending at its natural destination. Bodies littered the street, some moaning, some unmoving, but all maimed by his disregard for human life.

Then, Toshinori froze at the sight of three familiar faces standing at the base of a particularly large pile of uplifted material.

“Young Bakugou?”

“Stop, Bakugou! It’s too late! You’re just going to injure yourself! Stop!” Young Ida and Kirishima were holding a screaming Bakugou back from a mess of rubble that appeared as though wind had sheared it clean through. *But… where is… young Midoriya?*

“Buddy, we understand. Just let me do it, with my Quirk, I don’t have to worry about-” Kirishima tried to interject, pulling at him as Toshinori marched forwards. “Maybe he’s still-“

“-Shut the fuck up. He’s fucking gone. What don’t you understand about that? He. IS. GONE! HE ISN’T COMING BACK! THE WARP DIDN’T ACTIVATE ON HIM!” Bakugou screamed at them, piercing the ambient moans. *No…*

“Kids! Where’s young Midoriya?” Toshinori urged as he sprinted to them and watched them freeze. All For One could wait.

Young Bakugou was shaking violently as he spun to face Toshinori. “Deku’s gone,” young Bakugou heaved and All Might’s stomach dropped into his feet. *No.* “That fucking bastard dropped a fucking building on us and Deku… Deku shoved us out the way and…” Young Bakugou’s voice terminated with a strangled sob. “He’s gone.”

“He’s gone,” echoed numbly and endlessly through Toshinori’s head without making an impact. “What…” Toshinori struggled to hold his voice together. “Where is he now?”

“That… masked prick took his body. Took him from that rubble. That's how I knew he was dead. The warp didn’t work on him,” young Bakugou whispered in a broken voice as Toshinori drew him into a bone crushing hug and the boy wailed into his arms, while Kirishima and Ida blankly stood staring on, as if the rest of the world had stopped existing.

It had cost One For All, but All For One had already cost him so much more and there wasn’t even going to be a body to bury for it.

Resume

Chapter Summary

So it resumes...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

That was odd. Midoriya's phone had been ringing before… Only moments before had Shouto been given the all clear. Now it was saying it had been turned off. Weird.

"You can't get through either?" Yaoyorozu asked, frowning deeply. "They were at the train station before. Only Midoriya's phone isn't ringing. The rest are ringing, but they're not picking up. Something might have happened." It was really starting to look that way.

But why wouldn't they pick up? The cameras had been forced to cut away when the villain had deflected one of All Might's blows, the shockwave forcing the helicopter out of range. *What* had happened? Had the villain caused something to happen near Midoriya and the others? Maybe something had fallen near them?

"Keep trying. Midoriya was on his phone moments ago." But wasn't now. But wasn't after the villain's backhand. His phone could have been damaged if anything was knocked into the area, but Midoriya had his phone. And if the phone was damaged… where was Midoriya? Where was the villain? Where was All Might? They couldn't go back… could they? "Change of plans, we need to find a hero or someone with the police. We can't cross back through where All Might and the villain, but we can tell them where we last saw Bakugou and the others and maybe they'll take us to them."

Yaoyorozu's frowned deeper still. "Midoriya and the others might have been near the trajectory of that deflection…" And Yaoyorozu would know all about trajectories when she'd spent so long with artillery as her long range weapon of choice and that only made Shouto's stomach twist with all the more urgency.

Shouto nodded, swallowing down a lump. "Yeah."

"Fine."

Kirishima and Ida had been kicked out the room before this bastard detective crawled in like some lizard person. Katsuki took it back. It was an insult to lizard people. This guy was just scum. They were all waiting on their parents now while this detective wasted his time. They hadn't looked too hot either. Ida hadn't stopped wailing and Kirishima wasn't far behind him. He didn't know what to say. They didn't know what to say.

Katsuki didn't want to cry. He wanted to wrap his hands around Shigaraki's throat and squeeze his head off his shoulders. He figured Deku's mother would appreciate it more. And it might do something about the itch in his eyes…

"What the fuck do you mean you found his phone?" Katsuki snarled from his hospital bed. The dour face man sitting opposite shrugged. Some detective Katsuki's arse. Katsuki didn't care about the bastard's name, not when he'd not given a shit about Katsuki trying to tell him about the masked bastard taking Deku.

There was a skeletally thin man hovering in the closed doorway that no one had attempted to remove yet, his eyes filled with pools of water. Katsuki could see them dripping down the guy's oversized shirt. Something about his presence made Katsuki far more uncomfortable than the useless detective who was dodging the answer.

"Well, Bakugou, Midoriya's phone was found outside the rubble. Got knocked loose when he tossed you out the way. We have it in evidence and it was identified by his friends who were there with you," the detective droned. That must have been Todoroki and Yaoyorozu then, because if they'd showed that phone to Ida and Kirishima, Katsuki was going to shove it clean up the arse of the most senior officer there. The latter two at least might not know what had happened yet.

"What the fuck does that have to do with the bastard who stole his body?" Katsuki growled across the distance. What the hell did a phone have to do with some creep who stole bodies of dead kids?

"Well… we only have your word for it that Izuku Midoriya's body was taken…"

Katsuki paused. He allowed the words to sink in. Then he twitched,

feeling his freshly relocated arm explode with pain as he did so. “Excuse me, you fucking muppet? You have an entire street lined with cameras and you expect me to believe that you shitheads didn’t check the CCTV footage? It’s a fucking train station. Everyone has fucking CCTV.” Katsuki leaned further forward, baring his teeth at the unflinching, grey faced bastard. “You. Didn’t. Check.”

“These businesses sustained severe damage due to the attac-”

“Bullshit, you prick.” A cover up. It was a fucking cover up. They were going to fucking hide it. “Where the fuck is his body? Why do you have a phone and no body? What the fuck are you going to tell his mother? That he was disintegrated by falling concrete?” Katsuki could see the skeleton move from the doorway and edge his way closer as though he was stepping through a minefield. The thought made Katsuki’s throat close painfully and he swallowed. Fucking Deku and minefields.

“Excuse me, Detective. You’re upsetting my student. I must request that you come back later after he’s had time to rest,” the skeleton spoke in a low and… familiar voice and Katsuki was relieved. So the skeleton was from U.A. then… Explains how he got in… All Might had fucking vanished not long after. Hopefully All Might was fucking chasing the bastard to the ends of the Earth. Fuck knows the police weren’t gonna be doing shit.

“Ah, that’s okay. I’ll come back and speak to him when he’s calmed down,” the detective nodded, jumping at any bullshit excuse. Didn’t even take a statement.

“I’m right here, asshole. Answer my question!” Katsuki shouted. “Are you just going to lie about it?”

“Not now young Bakugou,” the skeleton whispered into Katsuki’s ear and Katsuki froze. That almost sounded like… “That will be all, Detective…”

And without another word, the piece of shit detective was gone, the door snapping shut behind him and the skeleton sighed while mopping up his piercing blue eyes.

“To answer your question, young Bakugou, yes, they are going to lie about young Midoriya’s body being taken by All For One,” the skeleton sighed, falling into the seat next to Katsuki. “U.A. were

notified by the police that young Midoriya's heroics were going to be emphasised without the downsides of his actions. They've caught Shigaraki and the members of the League of Villains that were present. Young Midoriya's mother is going to be told that he's merely missing and not… passed on as you told me. Them finding his phone gave them an out. Without his body formally noted as being taken, no effort will be made towards recovering it," the skeleton scowled. "I'm limited in what I can do due to that bastard All For One still being active."

"How do you…" Katsuki's eye widened and it clicked. The eyes, the hair, the voice, the knowledge. "All.. Might…?" Was that really All Might?

"I am here!" And the skeleton was replaced by All Might typical form, only to be gone in an instant, coughing blood in a voluminous spray.

"Shit, are you alright?" Katsuki fumbled for his box of tissues, handing a wad to his bleeding teacher and idol as his brain struggled to catch up. What the fuck was going on? Why… why did All Might look like he was one foot in the fucking grave? What the hell was going on? Who the fuck had done this to All Might?

"I suppose… I have some explaining to do," All Might, so frail and sickly, whispered through his clutch of tissues and Katsuki could only sink back onto his bed feeling numb. "After… after what you saw, I think you deserve it. And maybe then we can try to understand what happened today and why All For One took young Midoriya's body." Understand… What the fuck? What was there to understand? Katsuki was fucking useless regardless of All Might being… sick.

"We wouldn't fucking be here if I wasn't such a useless fucking weakling." Too weak. Too slow. Too useless. Deku might still be-

"Don't blame yourself, young Bakugou. All For One was the one who left me in this state you see," and All Might lifted his shirt, revealing a gaping scar that left Katsuki recoiling. The hole must have been fucking huge.

"What the fuck. He did that?" Katsuki struggled for a moment… maybe not All For One then, but he should have at least been able to deal with a fucking building.

"Yep," All Might grinned toothily, then it faded away. "Six years ago

now. He was here today to finish the job, I suspect. Shigaraki was one of his pawns." All Might shrugged. "All For One was very fastidious about dealing with people like me."

"This doesn't make any fucking sense." And it didn't. Deku was a nobody. One mother. No father. No other relatives. Nothing going on. Nothing special. "Why the fuck would a prick like that steal a nobody teenager's corpse when he could be finishing you off?"

"That," All Might sighed, "is what we need to find out, because the police will not be assisting us and Mrs Midoriya will have no body to bury, otherwise. I think," All Might's face screwed up, his eyes filling with tears, "I think we at least owe her a body to bury."

Katsuki inhaled sharply. "Fuck the police." All Might had been crying. All Might was fucking crying. All Might. Crying. Katsuki inhaled slowly and deeply.

All Might winced. "I'm only agreeing with you in this one instance, young Bakugou, because we will likely have to tell young Midoriya's mother what really happened otherwise she'll be left with the false hope her son is still alive and well."

Katsuki clenched his teeth. "What else do you know about this bastard?"

The boy had been… for want of a better term… shattered… Memories from six years prior flickered to mind and the doctor shuddered. It was going to be one of those cases that defied conventional medical help. There was nothing in the textbooks for reanimating a broken corpse, but fortunately at this point in career he had developed experience beyond such limited tools of education. When working in such a career it came with the territory.

Unmoving, lifeless… not quite expressionless, indeed, it was almost serene for such a young person. Little Izuku Midoriya had the slightest hint of a smile, even as he lay there in death. It would be unprofessional to wonder how it happened, but still his thoughts wandered to how it had happened and to the logical outcome of how Sensei had been in the proximity for such a speedy recovery of the body… A body that had been pulverised, seemingly by debris… As though the boy had been caught in the crossfire… But now he looked

so happy. What a contrast to the last time he'd seen him…

It was difficult to believe that only eleven years ago the boy had been in his clinic with his mother… Now he was here, not even having reached adulthood. He'd told him to give up and now…? Now… now… The doctor frowned, even as he manipulated the boy's fragile heart.

No use in dwelling on the past… Sensei was awaiting results.

The boy shouldn't be alive. No human should live through such an experience. He'd been in medicine long enough to know a hopeless case when he saw it, but Sensei wasn't taking "no" for an answer. It wasn't an existing option on the table of outcomes. It simply wasn't present. The boy was going to survive the experience… or else.

Even if for good reason no one should survive such an experience. Sensei was uniquely positioned and still keenly felt adverse outcomes, but the child? The doctor swallowed heavily beneath his mask.

Sensei no doubt had his reasons… the doctor simply hoped that he fully understood the consequences of them.

Light and sound and then there wasn't. It was just… dark. He hadn't really expected anything else. It was the same last time as well, the gradual fade to black.

It was peaceful and that was all he could ask for really. As peaceful as one could ever really expect as their brain slowly died from oxygen deprivation. Hopefully everyone else had made it and were doing well.

Izuku couldn't feel anything. Maybe that was for the best. It was a building after all. Izuku could take an educated guess at what it was going to do. It was him or them. What was one of him versus all of them? What was there even to think about?

Was… was death meant to be… noisy… he could hear something… a rush of sound? It wasn't going away. That… that hadn't happened under the bridge… had it? Izuku couldn't remember… And voices? Maybe two?

Was… was he still alive?

How? Why?

In hospital there hadn't just been two voices…

Why was it so dark? Why wasn't there any pain?

Izuku could feel again. There was something… someone? Warm. Resting on one hand. Something resting on his face… a mask? Sheets draped over him. Something… in his other arm? A drip?

He flexed his toes and felt those sluggishly twitch… That was a sign?

He still couldn't make out the voices, even though one of them seemed to have changed slightly.

It was still so dark… was there something over his eyes?

But as time surely passed… he could make out a hand far larger than his own was interlocked with his own fingers. Why? Who?

Where was he?

What was that sound?

And… why wasn't it moving?

Chapter End Notes

Here you go~

Breathe

Chapter Summary

All they had to do was breathe.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Inko couldn't breathe. The detectives were very nice. But she couldn't breathe. Her teacup rattled in its saucer, the grim faced detective opposite paused, his eyebrows creasing in slow motion.

"Mrs Midoriya? Are you alright?"

"I…"

Mrs Midoriya… may we come in?

Your son is missing.

Kamino Ward… when the buildings fell… we found his phone…

There was no trace of him in the rubble so far though.

Her son's phone, cracked, buckled and bent, was sitting on her coffee table.

Her son was nowhere to be found.

Missing.

Why had he even been there? He said he'd be home late… but where was he even going to go? Surely he was staying overnight with friends… but a deeply traitorous part of Inko's brain knew better.

For a long time now, Izuku had been alone with no close friends to speak of. Even now, Izuku hadn't mentioned being close enough to anyone to be privately invited over let alone stay overnight at someone's house.

Had… Had Izuku gone to look for Bakugou?

Is that why he was so close to the villains? Is that why he was missing?

Because… because she let him go?

Izuku… missing… Gone?

Not coming back?

How would he come back from fallen buildings?

She couldn't breathe.

What was she going to tell Hisashi?

What was Hisashi going to say?

Hisashi who hadn't spoken to his son before.

Inko's breath caught in her throat. She couldn't breathe.

Toshinori couldn't breathe and loosened his tie before it became a noose around his neck. Tsukauchi assured him was the latest in policing fashion. In fact, his whole suit was the sort of dreary blue that was the latest in policing fashion. It was exactly what Toshinori needed. Mr Yagi was going to be dreariest person at the police station if Toshinori had his way. Until he interrogated the League of Villains. Then he was going to be the biggest bastard to walk the earth, but baby steps first.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" Tsukauchi grimaced. "We're more than capable of sorting this out. I know he was your student…" *I know he was your student, but we think you're too close to the issue to be handling this in an unbiased manner*, was what Tsukauchi wanted to say. Toshinori could understand that. He also understood that that there was a substantial risk of him maiming the next villain he apprehended with his current mindset and only All For One was currently worthy of that dubious honour.

One For All was a flickering, guttering flame, ready to go out in Toshinori because he hadn't been able to save young Midoriya… All

For One's response had taken him aback. Toshinori hadn't seen the man flee so quickly since their first encounter when the media had begun to arrive and All For One had abruptly aborted without another word. All For One liked his privacy… which made his exposure to the cameras even stranger.

"I'm positive," Toshinori bit out shortly, tightening his tie again, for a brief moment imagining wrapping his hands around All For One's neck and squeezing as he did so. "We should take all available opportunities to locate All For One's whereabouts and the whereabouts of young Midoriya's remains." Toshinori's voice caught ever so slightly.

Remains. All For One had taken a body. Not even the living, breathing person, but a body. Why? Young Midoriya had been inconspicuous for the most part, the media not having taken much of a shine to him with a class full of royalty from families long into heroics. It should have shielded him from All For One's interest, but instead this had happened.

Had… All For One worked out the link? The thought alone made what was left of Toshinori's stomach lurch. All For One made weapons from living people… what horrific experimentation was he capable of with a dead one? He didn't approve of what the police had done with Inko Midoriya, but Missing In Action was better then Body Stolen By Centuries Old Psychopath For Depraved Experimentation. The Noumu were All For One's creation and Toshinori was hardening himself for the next abomination to crawl from those laboratories, even if it was what was left of young Midoriya. Then again, at least if that was the case they'd have some closure.

So long as All For One kept young Midoriya's body, god only knows what he was doing with it. There still wasn't any confirmation that All For One knew the next successor of One For All… so why did he take young Midoriya? Young Bakugou was more eager than even Toshinori to get to the heart of matter…

"Wouldn't… doing it as All Might be more effective?" Tsukauchi seemed to hesitantly ask through Toshinori's cloud of thoughts, and Toshinori didn't know why Tsukauchi was feeling the need to be sensitive about it. Not when Toshinori had seriously weighed the pros and cons himself before volunteering himself to the police department for their protracted bout of good cop/bad cop.

Tomura Shigaraki hated All Might, but Toshinori wasn't aiming for hate. Toshinori wanted to unsettle the League of Villains in his stint as the in house bad cop of the police department. Hate would make Shigaraki sink his heels in and play games with All Might… but… how *would* Shigaraki react to a far more businesslike Mr Yagi? Shigaraki who had completely disappeared in the face of injury… How would he react to Mr Yagi coughing up fountains of blood? Toshinori was rather curious. As were the staff psychologists and psychiatrists, off the record.

"No…. Shigaraki's already told us what he thinks of All Might, I think a less familiar face might be more beneficial here…" Especially when Shigaraki would be inclined to withhold information just to spite All Might. Tsukauchi's grimace wasn't very encouraging, but Toshinori had a feeling that was deeper down than a disheartening look. "But that's a bit of a longer term goal, first I need to settle in as an employee, eh?" And get his own desk and workload so no one suspected that All Might's holiday coincided with Mr Yagi's new job.

All to take a break from U.A., where he couldn't escape the ghost of young Midoriya's staring face from the empty seat that everyone refused to fill or the empty seats of nearby of students who'd gone on leave following his "disappearance". The class knew better. Young Bakugou made sure of that.

Katsuki couldn't breathe. "He. Is. Fucking. Dead. You. Morons." He could only see the surrounding table in a haze of red, his hands crackling wildly.

"But-but the police," the purple haired little shit almost seemed beside himself. If he didn't keep his fucking mouth shut Katsuki was going to make that a reality when he tore his head off his shoulders.

"Are too busy lying to everyone so they don't have to go after All For One," Katsuki snarled. "You should have heard the one hundred percent bullshit they were going to feed to his mother. I'm gonna need some of you to help me sneak off to tell her later because my parents don't want me to tell her either." And quite frankly, fuck his parents, what the fuck did they know? Inko Midoriya should be planning Deku's funeral and getting her useless bastard of a husband back in to attend it, even if was an empty casket. Maybe then the bastard would understand that his son's lifespan was finite and wasn't going to wait for some prick to be done with some shit job.

Katsuki didn't know shit about Hisashi Midoriya, but the fact that he didn't know anything about him meant that he was going to punch him out at the funeral if he bothered to show up. Grief did shit to people. That's what he was telling the cops at least. He had a plan.

Glasses wasn't at the improvised gathering even if everyone else was. Katsuki couldn't blame him. He'd gone with the express purpose of keeping Deku safe and now Deku was gone keeping their sorry arses from being crushed, *because Katsuki was too fucking slow.*

"Bakugou saw what happened, he's not lying," Ponytail sobbed, pulling tissues from her arm. The Pinky, Invisible and Froggy weren't much better off. Katsuki tried not to look at them. "They made us identify his phone… we didn't know or we wouldn't have-" then she erupted into a wail that made Katsuki want to punt that fucking detective through a window.

Ice Bastard stared ahead. "He stole a dead body. Why would he want a dead body? He can only take Quirks from living people, can't he?"

Thank god one of these useless fucks was being productive. Better than all of this crying shit. All of them fucking crying. He couldn't handle it. His parents fucking expected him to cry like some wimp. No point in doing that shit. It wasn't going to bring him back or fix anything. Not when Deku's body was still missing. Someone had to keep their shit together and find him. All Might was working on the police end to get some information from those fuckwits within the League of Assholes. That didn't mean Katsuki and the extras couldn't do some brainstorming outside of police intel.

"No, he can't from what All Might said," Katsuki grunted approvingly. "Living people only. That's where we got stuck."

"And you're sure…" Purple's lip wobbled and Katsuki glared at him.

"That masked bastard even closed his open and very dead eyes. And he warped alone. There was nothing on Deku, he was just along for the ride. Deku's dead as a doornail and he got taken anyway…" Katsuki slammed the round table with a fist for emphasis.

"Closed his eyes…" Pink warbled, "why would he do that?"

"Huh?"

Before long, the whole group was staring at Katsuki. “You’re sure you saw him close Midoriya’s eyes?” Froggy croaked.

“Fucking positive. Took his sweet time doing it before he warped. Why?” Katsuki stared at them, they stared back.

“That’s creepy,” Moron remarked, shuddering.

“Bakugou, look at it from our point of view, why the hell is a supervillain closing the eyes of some random victim?” Kirishima asked, looking slightly green. “I didn’t see it, but god… And didn’t he, like, leave the entire League of Villains behind to take Midoriya as well?”

Katsuki’s mug exploded in his hand, showering the table in shards glass. “What the fuck. Why the fuck would Deku’s corpse be worth more than the entire League of Assholes?”

“Could it be his Quirk?” Moron asked, defying his first impressions for the first time in a long time. “Midoriya’s Quirk was crazy flashy.”

Glitter Blondie bit his lip. “Midoriya’s body truly was unsuited his to his Quirk. I’ve never seen someone’s Quirk shatter bones like his Quirk did him. I too cannot handle Naval Laser without a support belt, but that degree of injury…” He trailed off. “The evolution of Quirks largely prevented such Quirks from occurring. It’s unnatural. His recoil was just as likely to damage him as it was another person. I think it was inspiring that he did so well when it caused those injuries…” Glitter faltered and wiped his eyes and Katsuki looked away.

“Deku was a late bloomer,” Katsuki snorted, “you’d almost think it was given to him it was so late.” Then he froze. *Shit.*

Deku was a late bloomer. Deku hadn’t shown a Quirk for most of his life. Deku who said he’d borrowed it. Deku had an extremely powerful outlier Quirk that tore him apart. Deku with a connection to All Might who’d apparently been taking care of him… and now one to All For One who was in a feud with All Might…

Unless… Deku had the connection to All For One first…

“You bastards don’t… don’t think that…” Katsuki couldn’t breathe.

There was no way Deku would be complicit in that shit. He couldn't have known. Deku was as clueless about those League bastards as the rest of them, he had to have known about All For One from All Might, but the Quirk itself couldn't have been from any other source. Katsuki couldn't fucking breathe.

Kirishima had a similar expression of horror. "Kamino. Midoriya recognised All For One at Kamino. He was the first to react."

"So," Pink whispered, "was he taken because of the Quirk or because he knew him?"

"What the fuck," Katsuki repeated into the silence and he turned and stormed from the building.

"Bakugou," Icy's voice called and Katsuki spun to face him and…a red eyed Kirishima.

"The fuck do you two want?" He had to be alone. He couldn't breathe. He was too slow. Always too slow. Too slow to realise, too slow to do anything.

"Buddy, I was there… You don't need to pretend that you didn't see it happen," Kirishima blurted out so bluntly that even Icy winced. "Nobody expects you to just… get it over it just like that. It's normal to be upset."

"Yeah, and what the fuck is being upset going to do when a fucking psychopath ran off with his dead body?" Katsuki screamed back across the gap. "I fucking knew he was Quirkless. I. Fucking. Knew. I didn't say anything and look at what fucking happened. Fuck off with your bullshit being upset."

Turning again of his heel, Katsuki marched off. He had to find All Might and ask him about Deku's Quirk. All For One had to be involved. The question was when and how and what the bastard was going to do with Deku's corpse.

Izuku couldn't breathe. There was something resting against the inside of his throat and it was all his foggy brain could do not to gag, then… a deeper darkness…

When Izuku awoke next, it was still pitch black. His toes would only faintly wiggle. Hands not much better. But… his hands were… wrapped… with something… almost like they were in mittens. Odd, they hadn't been there last time. Or had they?

This time he could breathe freely without anything covering his lower face. His eyes were covered? At least that was Izuku's assumption following his dry, hacking cough and the ache of a mouth that felt like it had gone months without water. At least he was vaguely leaning upwards, or Izuku had his suspicions that he would have choked on his own tongue.

Everything else… felt strangely muted. Izuku wasn't in a hospital or a ward. He couldn't smell the typical scent of one, but instead the faint scent of a cologne that was almost familiar hung about the air. The soundscape wasn't much better, with that faint rush of air Izuku had heard before (had he? He was still hearing it now after all) still present nearby, with a gentle hum of background noise.

It was too quiet to be a hospital. Not when Izuku, even for more minor altercations, had visitors or teachers fussing. Izuku felt his hands clench almost involuntarily.

Not a hospital.

Then, Izuku heard a rustle, an ever so slight shifting of fabric that wouldn't have been out of place from the background noise if it hadn't been so close to him. "Ah, you're awake," a deep and horribly familiar voice murmured. "Better late than never." Izuku would have liked to have called it mocking to further exacerbate his dread, but instead it sounded almost empty. All For One sounded as spent as Izuku felt. It had to have been long enough for All For One to have recovered from the fight with All Might… He had Quirks for that… Right? But All For One sounded as committed to villainy at the moment as Izuku did.

All For One… who was here, then… Izuku almost felt a physical click.

All Might! Izuku realised with alarm. If All For One was *here*, where was All Might?

Izuku opened his mouth to reply and winced at the dryness.

"Maybe water first?" The enigma suggested and Izuku felt the bonds on his hands fall away. As the mittens came away, All For One's hands

briefly grazed Izuku's own and Izuku flinched. "My apologies, but the rest of your treatment didn't agree with the coma that was induced to shield your brain and we had to restrain you… The blindfold is for your comfort as well… the methods we used to stabilise you didn't agree with your sight either." *Coma… I was in a coma? What did he do to my eyes?* Izuku thought vaguely to himself, feeling ill, but didn't have the time to dwell when the man seemed keen to carry on. "Yes, a coma, little Izuku Midoriya. Do you… remember what happened?"

Izuku shook his head, feeling his head pound as he did so, his growing need to flee eclipsed by his inability to lift his arms and the delicacy in All For One's voice. Hesitation? Izuku was dully amazed by the amount of tact. Hadn't seemed like he cared that much when Shigaraki had arrived at Kamino.

"You pushed your school associates from the path of falling debris and it landed on you instead," All For One gently explained, while Izuku was assisted by the less gentle mental image of multiple tonnes of concrete, glass and rebar and winced.

Then, Izuku felt a hand wrap around his shoulder and he recoiled. "I don't mean to be presumptuous… but you can't move on your own, can you?" With no eyes to guide him, Izuku could only hang off every word and every word was more unnerving than the last.

With more horror than any human should have been capable of feeling, Izuku feebly shook his head. Move? Wasn't Izuku moving a threat to All For One's ongoing wellbeing? If Izuku could walk he would have bolted for the nearest exit.

"Yes… I suspected as much," was muttered far more darkly. "We weren't entirely certain if you'd ever walk again, but you have some movement in your toes which is a positive sign. Not enough just yet to move your own weight clearly and I'd prefer you not to drown when you have your drink…" All For One carried on, then, without warning Izuku was lifted.

Izuku squawked indignantly, having no true voice for his complaint. To All For One's limited and fleeting credit, it was an eye's blink worth of time between Izuku's realisation and the glass being lifted to his lips.

It didn't alleviate the sense of violation that came with the resident mass murderer being within touching distance of him and doing so so

casually.

Not that Izuku was entirely sure that it was water. It tasted suitably tasteless for it to be filtered water. “Slowly,” All For One ordered. Of course Izuku could have refused… but he’d already woken up once with tubing forced down his throat, along with the implications of the induced coma and the Noumu All For One had kept stored at Kamino, Izuku was fortunate to have woken up at all. All For One could have just as easily stored Izuku in a jar, which sent a shudder running the length of Izuku’s body. *Why hadn’t he?*

“Why?” Izuku croaked, feeling the glass move away.

“Why what?” All For One lightly repeated, adjusting Izuku’s sheets as if he owned them. Well, he likely did, not that it was helping Izuku. In fact, the thought made butterflies swirl around his stomach as *where* and *who* he was with began to register.

“You’re the reason for the debris,” Izuku said bluntly, with a craving for sugar that he didn’t know was possible. What else had to be said? All For One wouldn’t have been throwing buildings around unless he wanted them to fall on people. Izuku was a person. Presumably he was one of those people.

“Indeed, but I was under the expectation that All Might would be intercepting the debris,” All For One said with the air of someone complaining about their morning commute. An unusual shift in tone for someone who sounded a step from the grave himself only moments ago. “Instead he failed dismally and he limped off after I made my retreat with you.”

All Might was safe! Izuku held in a sigh of relief, dwelled on the wording. Where was the League of Villains if All For One had left with Izuku? Surely he hadn’t just… dumped them and left? Izuku’s brain throbbed in protest at the conflict and Izuku let the contradiction drop.

“Why didn’t he?” Izuku probed. Izuku had’t seen the lead in to the exchange, just enough to know about the oncoming result. Why All Might hadn’t made it was clear, when All For One was a monster in a league of his own.

“I misjudged,” was the unsatisfying response.

Izuku paused and replayed the words to himself. *"I misjudged."* Not *"we"*, but *"I"*. "You said that you misjudged, not All Might… I don't understand… You wiped out everything bef-" and Izuku had to stop himself. Because All For One *hadn't* wiped out everything beforehand, otherwise Izuku wouldn't be around for All For One to accidentally drop a building on him. That small slice of wall that separated them from imminent death and discovery that somehow survived the initial blast… All For One whose footsteps were heard even as they planned to make their escape. If Izuku had heard him, who was to say *he* hadn't heard *them*?

"Did *you* know that we were there?" Slipped out before Izuku could stop himself.

"Did I?" All For One if anything only sounded faintly amused.

Izuku's hands clenched under the sheets. That wasn't a denial. Izuku had picked a moment when All For One had appeared to be distracted, but… had he let them escape? Izuku swallowed heavily. If he knew that they were there, a few metres more on his pressure blast and they had no Best Jeanist to save them from the impact. All For One had known that they were there and hadn't done anything to deter them from leaving. Nor had he made an attempt to drag Bakugou back. He knew from the start. How? Why? When?

"*You* found me under the rubble?" Izuku clarified, feeling his stomach burn. What was there even to find? So many tonnes… and All For One had still retrieved him…

Izuku didn't get an answer, instead a hand wrapped itself around one of Izuku's own and Izuku's brain derailed in a panic, unable to muster the strength to fend it off. "If I wanted to harm you, do you think you would have woken up at all?"

Izuku paused, his brain back in overdrive. "Define harm." Or was this some scheme of All For One to gain Izuku's trust? All Might had mentioned that All For One had been a unifying force once upon a time…

"So long as I don't cook, I'm sure you'll be fine," All For One almost purred, smoothing over Izuku's hand in what would have been a comforting manner if Izuku hadn't been acutely aware of All For One's identity. And the amount of people he'd most likely left to die who were no different to Izuku. Trapped, those left screaming in the rubble

who hadn't been saved.

Cooking? Izuku's stomach sank. "How… how long am I going to be here for?" Until… until he was used/disposed of/otherwise utilised? Izuku wasn't important. It's not like Izuku had a Quirk that All For One could steal. Izuku didn't have any reason to trust him either, just a long string of contradictory actions that were escalating into a type of nausea that shamed Izuku's pre-exam nerves.

"As long as it takes," All For One whispered.

It?

Then and only then did Izuku weep, a hand that wasn't his resting on his shoulder as he did so.

Chapter End Notes

If only people were honest...

Alternative

Chapter Summary

It wasn't worth considering.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shouta had expelled students for less. They'd given their statements. *They* could have been killed. One of their friends had been. *One of them had been.* Shouta had two shattered whiskey glasses as a testament. Neither had been swept up.

The rest of their friends were going to live with the trauma of what keeping their mouths shut had done… Something that made him knock back another shot of well aged whiskey paid for by the school's principal.

Not that he really approved of the three cases of alcohol that had been left in the staff room. Even if the alcohol was probably there for him and Vlad first and foremost, he was the last to get to it. It wasn't going to bring Midoriya back or deal with Ida who was still refusing to leave his room after the confirmation had come through. All it did was numb the pain for the moments like these and Shouta was all too used to bad news, but this… this was different.

Classes hadn't been suspended before. It wasn't just the Heroics Department as well, but all classes for a security review. Shouta wasn't sure if he'd be going back to a school or a prison by the time the review was done. It wasn't like any of the teachers got to have a say in the process. All contractors, all third party and all entirely removed from the school's control. A logical end to a process that everyone should have seen coming so much earlier.

Had… had the staff really been that far beyond reproach? Did the students really think their concerns couldn't be voiced because of retaliation by the faculty? The children didn't trust the people in their lives who were meant to take care of them. Tsuyu had decent parents, as did Jirou, Ida and Yaoyorozu off the top of his admittedly fuzzy head, so where had this come from? Had the students themselves lost confidence in the system? Or… did they, like Midoriya, not quite believe the hype? Shouta's stomach was wholly alcohol at this point

and churned even more unpleasantly than normally. Background noise at this point.

Todoroki and Ida were a no-brainer after the Stain incident. He'd heard rumours that Todoroki had outright threatened a high ranking cop. Then there was Ida who went hunting after Stain like some vigilante because of his brother. Unexpected but still frightening. Yaoyorozu should have known better than to agree to provide a tracker and Kirishima was only there to look out for his friend.

Todoroki might have even been a problem sooner. Endeavor had been involved straight after… and immediately uninvolved. Shouta had heard some clashes with parents in his time, but none so short as what Todoroki had told his father.

"Where were you when the building fell on Midoriya?" Todoroki had screamed inches from his father's face outside the main building. "Where were *any of you* when he died? At least we did something!"

Endeavor didn't have a reply when his son stormed past him. Death did that to people.

Especially when Endeavor's only interaction with Midoriya, by all accounts, was to treat him like dirt in their only encounter before he died. Then, his actions at Kamino couldn't have made him look any better in his son's eyes. Everyone knew where he was, still looking for a fight and yelling at All Might instead of trying to clear the area. Maybe the media was giving them a pass, but his son sure as hell wasn't. Shouta wasn't sure that he was on the media's side in this case either. The rules were the rules, usually, but rules became the rules for a reason.

A bunch of bright kids aiming to be part of the system and they didn't even trust it this far in. It should have been a no-brainer to sign on those four dotted lines, they were a liability to themselves and everyone around them. But he… hesitated… because Todoroki had a point. Midoriya had a point, even if he wasn't around to explain it anymore in his watery eyed way and never would be able to again.

Shouta took another shot.

Nobody higher up wanted to make the decision, wanted the responsibility to kick out the kids that succeeded where everyone else failed at the cost of one of their own. It'd only add to the trauma.

Shouta didn't want it either. Midoriya was dead at All For One's hands while they all played distraction back at the school. No body to bury, no closure, nothing for the crying students that weren't in their classes. Nothing for the mother who was being lied to by the police. No funeral. Not so long as the death certificate wasn't issued. No death while the coroner was told to keep his mouth shut.

He wondered how long that was going to last for with Bakugou's attitude to what happened. Probably not all that long. The media already thought Bakugou was crazy. Bakugou didn't seem to care at all about what the media thought of him. It was going to cost him his career at this rate, why not do it early and spare him the misery? It was the pragmatic option. Give him time to recover from the trauma and get his life back on track and get away from his childhood friend being murdered in front of his eyes.

It still sounded like a weak excuse. Bakugou would never accept that and nor would anyone else. Not while Izuku Midoriya wasn't allowed the death he deserved.

It should have been easy to wipe out the whole class when all of them knew the the plan. He'd have no class to teach and he could go back to work for a year and not have to think about Midoriya's mangled body being dragged from beneath slabs of concrete and desecrated by a supervillain. He could put it all behind him. He could rest easy… Yeah, right.

They all knew where the kids were going and not a single one of them had warned staff… yet… Yet Midoriya hadn't been killed picking a fight with the League of Villains… or sizing All For One up one on one. None of them were injured in a direct conflict. None of them had even gone to the original source of the action. If anything, the source of the conflict had somehow found them and then deliberately ignored them to pick a fight with All Might.

All For One hadn't deliberately targeted Midoriya. Hadn't hunted him down and taunted All Might with the boy's death while stringing his corpse up in the air. Hadn't even seemed to realise he was there at all until it was too late.

No, 1-A's Problem Child was killed shoving a bunch of other kids out of the way of a falling building. It could have happened to anyone, on any other day, in any other circumstance and it wouldn't have been anywhere near as tragic… If anything, Izuku Midoriya's death came

off as a tragic accident… as much as a supervillain demolishing a city could be called a tragic accident. Even the supervillain himself seemed to think better of it though, with the frantic dig through the building's remains. Shouta was trying not to think about those implications. Uncharacteristic nausea was something they were meant to be able to deal with, but the faculty knew about the Noumu and now that they knew about the Noumu? Why else would that bastard want the poor kid's corpse? Shouta smothered the thought with more alcohol.

All Might seemed to be additionally aware of it with his emergency leave, but someone had to hold things together at U.A. and there was still the spy unaccounted for. The spy who killed Midoriya by proxy… Shouta felt his third shot glass shoot from his hand and dully heard it shatter on the floor. Shouta might save All Might a lock of their hair if he found them first… accidents happened, he supposed. Especially if Bakugou was anywhere nearby. Bakugou should probably be invited to be nearby, just in case. He was the one kid Shouta could definitely rule out before he looked at anyone else.

But petty revenge wasn't going to solve his paperwork for expulsion. To sign or not to sign.

What was the alternative? What would have happened if Midoriya and the others hadn't been there?

Shouta had watched the footage he had access to countless times along with the rest of the faculty, trying to process what had happened. Trying to find out *why*.

Bakugou wouldn't have escaped without Midoriya's intervention and without his plan to get the drop on the League while All For One was distracted. Their eyes in the sky from the media could only see so much, but the kids confirmed the rest. All Might couldn't be everywhere at once with his injuries and Bakugou wasn't at his best.

All Might couldn't let loose while Bakugou was there and Bakugou only needed a momentary slip up and he was a goner to either Shigaraki or Compress. Shigaraki in particular was less interested in taking Bakugou in one piece after the latter's refusal, intending to sic All For One on him, much to the bastard's glee. (Shouta's stomach churned again at All For One taking Midoriya's corpse while leaving the very much so alive League of Villains and Bakugou behind…. What was he playing at? Wasn't the city enough?)

If Midoriya and the others hadn't gone, Bakugou wouldn't have been recovered. None of the other heroes had even thought to reinforce All Might at the time until it was too late. But Midoriya knew, somehow. None of the others knew how either. All Might had outright cried when they asked him about his suspicions so there was no luck there (and if that wasn't one of the worst things Shouta had ever seen).

The kids were right. The pro heroes weren't up to the task, but even if they had voiced those concerns, would anyone have listened? Shouta doubted it. They would have been brushed off, like kids normally were. Even though they were right. Even though All Might alone wasn't enough.

And it had cost them Midoriya.

Shouta downed another shot with another glass, scrunched up the paperwork and hurled it into the bin. They weren't responsible for what happened, because if U.A. couldn't defend its students it sure as hell wasn't entitled to the unconditional trust of them.

He crawled into his sleeping bag, trying to blink away afterimages of dust in grainy CCTV footage and the unmistakable sound of Bakugou's screams from the hospital and the bloody images of Midoriya's body vanishing through a warp.

Uraraka's text message blinked at him on his still lit phone's screen, leaving an irritating glare spot on the lenses of his glasses. Tenya wasn't terribly surprised that Bakugou had stormed out with his own suggestion that Midoriya's Quirk might have come from a supervillain. It did almost make Tenya wish that he had made it himself, but… but was it right to be attending what wasn't much more than disrespectful gossip when… when the person in question was no longer there to defend himself? It didn't feel right. Nothing felt right. He wasn't sure if anything would ever feel right.

Tenya had gone to make sure they were removed from harm, that no one did anything impulsive. To make sure everyone returned safely. And up until nearly the end he thought they'd been successful. With Midoriya's plan they'd miraculously managed to grab Bakugou, snatch him from the hands of the League of Villains and leave their vicinity. That had to be enough? Right?

Then Midoriya hadn't returned. Midoriya wasn't going to return. Ever. Midoriya was gone. Midoriya had saved them. Again.

Tenya couldn't swallow down the tears. He hadn't been able to since the news was confirmed. What the point in him going to the class meetup that Bakugou of all people had organised? Bakugou who hadn't even liked Midoriya? Bakugou who accused Midoriya of consorting with supervillains and the League of Villains during the meetup? Bakugou who didn't care. What was the point in going anywhere when he had failed in his duty as the Class President?

Midoriya was the first to stand up and defend others. The first to take charge and help others. To go beyond even the law to help others… and maybe that was why Bakugou had drawn the conclusions he had, because for Midoriya the law had always been an afterthought. A suggestion of villainy would cripple most of the members of the class, but not Midoriya. It hadn't stopped Tenya either, but Midoriya had never acted for a reason so petty as revenge. Midoriya who Tenya had punched in the face. Tenya choked on another sob, facedown, tangled in his sheets.

Tenya had punched the person who lost his life saving him from a collapsing building. Tenya hadn't told any of the teachers about their plans. Tenya let them go in the first place. He and Yaoyorozu hadn't told anyone… They were the leaders of the class and they hadn't told anyone anything and now Midoriya was dead.

How could he face any of his classmates or even be the Class President when he couldn't look at himself in the mirror?

Resumes were a delicate thing at the best of times and Toshinori Yagi was going to need something convincing to fool an entire office full of gossiping detectives that Mr Yagi was what he seemed. He couldn't exactly lie, but telling the truth was definitely off the table. It was a delicate process that wasn't going to be happening with young Bakugou about to chew a hole through his kitchen table. The way he'd almost blasted in his front door earlier with murder in his eyes was also a sign. Not a particularly good sign, but a sign nonetheless.

"All Might," the blond boy grated, incandescent with rage. "This is important."

Toshinori didn't doubt it for a moment from the way young Bakugou writhed on his chair. "Young Bakugou… are you alright?" The boy went out with his class for lunch. What on earth could have happened? Nothing immediately serious or the police would have been involved.

"Did Deku get his Quirk from All For One?" Young Bakugou exploded and Toshinori felt his pencil snap in two and his jaw sag. *Shit.*

"Where is this coming from?" Toshinori forced out with a slack tongue.

"Did he?" Bakugou demanded, thumping the table erratically with a fist. "Deku never had a Quirk. Fucking never. I remember him telling us after he came back from that fucking doctor that was Tsubasa's gramps. Cried his fucking eyes out. Showed nothing for years. Fucking nothing. Then, all of a sudden, out of fucking nowhere, he has a Quirk. Said he borrowed one. Quirk that breaks every single fucking bone in his body and All For One and the League of Villains are on our asses at the exact same time Deku gets his fucking Quirk."

Toshinori's tongue was caught on itself before he could interrupt him. Had young Bakugou and young Midoriya known each for that long? Toshinori hadn't taken into account that someone might find it suspicious, but for it to be Bakugou of all people… But the boy was still going on. "Then for Shigaraki to be after him constantly at the mall? All For One to take his corpse? There's only one fucking person around who can give and take Quirks and it's that bastard." Young Bakugou paused, chest heaving up within Toshinori's view… Toshinori squinted. Were young Bakugou's eyes wet? Or were his kitchen's light's broken again? "Did Deku know about it?"

Probably not the kitchen light then. Toshinori cleared his throat. "Young Bakugou… What I tell you doesn't leave this room, alright? It's vital that no one knows… especially after what happened to young Midoriya."

"If it means I get a straight fucking answer for once then fine," the boy grumbled.

And Toshinori spoke, not bothering to hold back the tears as he did so.

Katsuki couldn't fucking breathe. Even with the triple strength cup of coffee All Might had given him, he was struggling to swallow what he'd just heard. Instead he watched its surface ripple and shake in his hands.

All For One. One For All. The Quirk of All For One's brother that eventually ended up with All Might, who'd given it to Deku. All Might who was originally Quirkless. All Might who was Quirkless again after giving it to Deku. Deku who had the Quirk. Deku who was dead. Deku who wasn't coming back. Deku who couldn't pass it on because Katsuki was a fucking dumbass who hadn't run the fuck away like Deku had told him to back in the forest. Katsuki who killed All Might. All For One who was still fucking free to run around and have another go at a Quirkless All Might.

"I killed him," Katsuki whispered. "I fucking killed him. *I should have fucking moved when they told me to." I fucking killed All Might too.*

All Might recoiled, face creased. "Young Bakugou… You didn't see the building fall… Even at my best I was hard pressed to manage All-"

"-No," Katsuki bit out. "In the forest, he *knew* before anyone that those fuckers were after me. He fucking told us and I fucking ignored Mandalay. *And now he's dead.*" Katsuki felt his voice crack before he heard it and saw the expression on All Might's face. "Now your Quirk…" He couldn't breathe. He was gasping for air and nothing was coming.

Then he was sent flying, stars in his vision as sat upright from the floor.

"What the fuck…" Katsuki blinked at a sheepish All Might who hurriedly stuck his arm behind his back. "You fucking punched me!"

"Did it work?" All Might shrank, nervously scratching the back of his head with one hand while the other held Katsuki's coffee. "It's… it's not going to bring young Midoriya back, nor are any of you to blame."

"Bullshit. I-" Katsuki started.

"-Am a child, young Bakugou." All Might said with such seriousness that Katsuki felt his indignation skid to an abrupt halt. His parents never sounded so… serious. Ever. They just fucking screamed at him

and hit until he fucked off. “Security and safety shouldn’t be your concern and rescuing a classmate shouldn’t have ever been young Midoriya’s concern. Yet it was,” All Might continued sadly, ambling over and holding out a hand to Katsuki. Katsuki grabbed it and lifted himself to his feet. “We failed and you all paid the price for it. Please don’t blame yourself for our mistake. Young Midoriya more than anyone wanted to help people and now…” *He’ll never help anyone again*, Katsuki silently finished, taking his seat back at the table, staring into his coffee.

It fucking stung. Katsuki never got Deku’s deal while he was alive. Never bothered to ask. What was the fucking point? It was obvious, right? Everyone else was in it for the salary, the fame, the glory, the lording over every other extra. That was the point of being a hero according to the hag and everyone else. It was about *being cool*, at the top of society. So of course Deku was like them, right? He was helping out because he thought that Katsuki was pathetic enough to need the help… Except that’s not what All Might was saying…

All those years spent attacking Deku who looked down Katsuki… but that Deku never existed in the first place, did he? If *he* didn’t exist, then who did exist? Why did Deku exist? Who the fuck even *was* Deku? It’s not like they were ever friends, not for a long time now and the more Katsuki tried to think about the green haired kid he went to school with the less he knew.

What was fucking left? Memories that made Katsuki want to fucking retch. Memories and Deku’s notebooks. Maybe some scattered recordings of him? Katsuki couldn’t think of anyone who’d have kept them though, Deku didn’t exactly have any friends or relatives that he could remember. He could ask Deku’s mother… but she didn’t even know that he was fucking dead yet and all that made him want to do was hurl his fucking coffee mug through the nearest window. Fucking shit police.

Maybe after he told her they could put together a memorial since her fuckwit of a husband wasn’t going to be helping her do it. Then they could find the real Deku, since there wasn’t going to be a body to bury. After hearing about One For All, Katsuki had a suspicion after what All For One would be doing with Deku’s and gulped.

“What are you thinking about?” All Might’s voice cut in and Katsuki frowned, feeling more perturbed than ever.

“You ever had the feeling that you know absolutely fucking nothing about someone even after knowing them for years?” Katsuki gulped down some of the coffee, thankful at its abysmal quality.

“Yes,” All Might murmured, poking an empty white sheet of paper.

“Who?”

“Myself. I have to write a resume for the police and I have no idea what to put down,” All Might grimaced.

Katsuki gagged on a hot mouthful of coffee. “What the fuck you don’t know what to write? You’ve been beating the shit out of villains for like forty fucking years? Busting drug rings? Terrorising All For One? Advising the fucking Japanese and American police nearly the whole fucking time.You’re a one man consultancy agency. What the fuck do you mean you don’t know what to put down?” Katsuki practically screamed across the gap.

All Might beamed at him and Katsuki wasn’t sure what to fucking think. “It sounds great when you put it like that, but I’m applying as Mr Yagi, not All Might. So, uh. I need a more, uh, serious approach, like our…,” All Might deflated sagged, “our exam with you and young Midoriya if I’m allowed to interrogate Shigaraki.”

It was as though someone had flicked on a switch in some distant part in Katsuki’s brain. Or maybe less of a switch and more an anti-tank mine. Fucking Shigaraki. Katsuki snarled. “Gimme that shit, this is how we write a fucking resume.” It couldn’t be that fucking difficult. All Might’s work was basically the same as the police, with a shitload more punching of people, but enough buzzwords and vagueness they could make it sound like some vague police bullshit and not like All Might. Mr Yagi was officially a secretary who handled all of All Might’s paperwork… luckily for All Might, he never specified exactly what sort of paperwork… and that left a shitload of room for interpretation. A little bit here and there and Mr Yagi wasn’t just the personal secretary, but All Might’s beleaguered and highly recommended chief intelligence officer who regularly met with one Detective Tsukauchi for police briefings on All Might’s behalf ever since the Villain Factory incidents. It could work.

Katsuki was three hours overdue getting home. His first words stepping in the front door were “go fuck yourself, I was helping a teacher and I’m going to bed” to his mother and he ignored her

screams about calling the police. She didn't fucking matter when All Might called the cops first. It took a few drafts, but they got something presentable in the end. That Detective Tsukauchi sounded like he'd fucking choked on the submission. It made Katsuki warm and tingly on the inside. Maybe he didn't have to help, but it was the expression of relief on All Might's face that went a bit towards explaining exactly why Deku gave no shits about the rest of the extras wanting to be the best.

Whatever the motivations of the extras for heroics, Deku was in it for himself in a way that went beyond being number one, whatever the fuck that meant.

Sensei's projects were delicate at the best of times, but the boy was something else. Not just medically speaking either, as from the doorway he observed Sensei lift a hand to the boy's face in a manner far from threatening, not that their… patient was going to be seeing it that way. Medically speaking, the child was a miracle on par with Sensei himself as far as the doctor was concerned. Some of the more… esoteric methods they'd used to restore the teenager's failed body would have utterly destroyed anyone else the doctor was almost sure. "Almost sure" because it was their first time applying the revised methodology and it certainly wasn't something that was applicable to the Noumu as a general rule. *Their* unique makeup made it a moot point.

Something he could have confirmed with further testing if Sensei hadn't swiftly vetoed it. He'd been told it wasn't necessary, that it wasn't something that was going to be required a second time. A wasted investment… that for some reason the ever so plain Midoriya was worthy of… It wasn't the doctor's place to ask, clearly… but Midoriya required this treatment while Shigaraki sat through gunshot wounds. It did make an educated man think.

Sensei wanted Izuku Midoriya wholly intact… and the fact of the matter was that they weren't quite there yet even with the strides made, much to Sensei's displeasure. Midoriya was hanging on, but how "wholly intact" was a child that couldn't walk, couldn't lift his arms and was blind as far as the doctor could tell? That was only from what he'd observed from a distance so far. Sensei hadn't moved for long enough for him to conduct any further examinations of his own in the short time the boy had been awake. The doctor, rather

privately, thought it was quite lucky the boy hadn't choked on that water, but supposed Sensei had enough experience of his own as well as a litany of Quirks to be making that judgement call. It was another private thought that Sensei perhaps too realised the problems that would occur if Midoriya remembered an old doctor from childhood.

The doctor still shifted nervously even while he waited and yes, his patient at the time had been young. It'd been years since he'd last seen Midoriya, but some memories stuck and he was sure that *that* particular meeting was going to be one of them. It wasn't an experience he was looking forward to, with Sensei no doubt loitering nearby as was the case with this project.

Regardless of his concerns, Izuku Midoriya's feeble whispers were only enough to momentarily displace Sensei's ire from the doctor's work, not distract it entirely. So long as the child wasn't fully functional, in spite of the miracle that had occurred, his work wasn't yet done. And so long as Sensei remained so close to the boy, it couldn't *be* done. It was all he could to to hold in a huff of irritation.

Management was left to Sensei as always, he had the most experience with these matters after all, but there was something about Midoriya that didn't quite fit the usual pattern. Sensei was just that as the title implied, but his hands currently did far more than merely guide. Sensei wanted a living, breathing, functioning human and he was given one for whatever purpose may be required. It's… it's just that the doctor hadn't expected him to micromanage this one quite so heavily or to hover or to lurk by the child's bedside. Shigaraki was given a sitter and left to it. In Midoriya's case, it was though Sensei himself had taken the role of the sitter.

There were some sneaking suspicions though. Midoriya's prior Quirklessness, Shigaraki's repeated unfortunate encounters with the boy, Midoriya's sudden display at the Sports Festival that Sensei had so keenly (almost apprehensively at times) watched, Stain's abrupt demise, Shigaraki's subsequent nervous breakdown after speaking to Midoriya, Muscular's abrupt arrival following what should have been his capture… Sensei'd only just acquired Search before space and time opened and Muscular's battered body had been wrenched through with no amount of care whatsoever.

In the latter case, Sensei had almost rapturously examined the damage done to Muscular by Midoriya who'd slammed the murderer clean through a mountainside. Then designated him for immediate

reutilisation, whereupon Sensei had plucked away at the man ever since. There was a degree of malevolence to that act that the doctor hadn't seen since…since… he swallowed uncomfortably… He hadn't seen since Midoriya would have been turning twelve.

The doctor had absolutely no idea what had prompted Sensei's displeasure, but it seemed to involve Midoriya. Midoriya was the key. A key that Sensei seemed to be turning over in his hand far more intently than Shigaraki and the doctor wondered… What made this one so special?

All he had to do for the moment was breathe. There wasn't much else that Izuku could do at the moment, even if he could move. Instead, Izuku trembled, paralysed. Why was he still alive and why here of all places?

"I'm not going to waste your or my time by telling you not to panic, because you're not going to take my word for it," All For One idly commented to Izuku's immense relief. "How about boundaries instead?"

Izuku hiccuped, struggling to lift a dead weight of an arm that would. Not. Move. "What boundaries?" The first thing that came to mind was a cell… but would All For One be loitering inside of one? Then again, there were cloning Quirks around if All For One was taking a hands off approach. Was… this even the real All For One? One of the League had a cloning Quirk, didn't they? That was a… very scary thought.

There was a faint rush of air, as though All For One had gestured. "Food, water, medication, amenities generally, standards of behaviour…" All For One carried on in a light manner that made Izuku's hair stand on end. It was the same one his mother used when she took him for vaccinations. The one where she was hiding something. "More importantly… what you can expect from me and what I can expect from you. You're a guest after all. There's no reason for this not to be civil."

Freezing, Izuku felt his jaw drop. Amenities? A guest? Civil? How many people had the man killed in a single blow? Over Shigaraki of all people? Izuku brain couldn't process Shigaraki's behaviour at the best of time, but All For One was something else. Eventually, Izuku found the words, staring straight ahead without even making an

attempt to face him (what was the point?). “You weren’t very civil when you dropped a building on my classmates.” And tried to kill All Might. And kidnapped Kacchan. And forced a Quirk on his own brother? (Had they worked that out yet?) And every other horrible thing he’d done in his lifespan that Izuku didn’t know about.

Izuku didn’t have eyes to guide him, but All For One’s warm, spidery hand wrapping around the side of his face was enough of a telegraph and he was nudged to blindly face the man. “Your classmates?” Confusion or puzzlement? Irritation even? Izuku couldn’t quite pin it down, but there was an edge there. “Your classmates walked away from the experience, little Izuku Midoriya,” All For One’s voice had a strangely strained quality to it anyway. “You did not.” Izuku’s breath caught in his lungs. If All For One meant that more than literally… “If you are going to express uncivil behaviour towards me, might I recommend it being due to the fact that your heart had ceased beating for over five minutes before you were resuscitated, because of the building I dropped on you.”

Izuku stared. “You… killed me?” That made sense. All For One killed a lot of people. That wasn’t too bad. Entirely within expectations really. A villain doing villain things.

“Yes.”

“Then you resurrected me from basically being dead?” Izuku faintly confirmed.

“Yes. Your state of being wasn’t ideal and still isn’t…” That made absolutely no sense. All For One’s hand hadn’t moved, a tangible reminder that Izuku hadn’t slipped into a bizarre dream world. Or maybe Izuku was trapped in some strange limbo and just hadn’t realised it yet.

“Why?” This made… absolutely no sense. All For One didn’t have a reason to bring Izuku back from the dead. None. Not on-

“Why what?” All For One… almost sounded confused. That… that threw Izuku for another loop.

“Why would you waste your time saving me? Wasn’t Shigaraki trying to kill me in the first place?” Then, his throat caught and Izuku coughed. He found himself being offered the glass of water again, which he sipped at while his brain floundered, feeling even more lost.

Did he know about Izuku having One For All? All Might having it didn't seem to be a deterrent to All For One flattening a city to kill him. Why would Izuku be saved? "I… I don't get it."

"You, a prospective hero, don't understand why you would be saved?" All For One didn't even sound mocking. "The brainwashing mill must be wor-"

"-No," Izuku butted in, "I don't understand why you specifically would stop trying to kill All Might specifically to save me specifically after you…"

"Maimed each other?" All For One helpfully added.

"Yeah," Izuku lamely finished.

"Mmm, I can't answer that question," All For One sighed, his gripping hand flexing into Izuku's face, making Izuku sharply jerk his head away. "Whoops, apologies." And Izuku was freed of the hand. "Your questions are warranted, but all in good time.

"Then what will you answer?" Izuku prodded, shuddering. He could still feel phantom fingers on his face.

"Bits and pieces, but understand that right now you're only speaking because of the painkillers. Once those wear off, you won't be feeling nearly as well as you do now… Most of your bones were shattered on impact. That you have so much movement is remarkable." All For One explained. "What happened to you was and is distressing and there isn't a great deal of good news to counteract the bad news. I was hoping to deliver the news slowly so that I wouldn't overwhelm you…"

Izuku blinked. At least he thought he blinked. It's not like he could tell and that again made the tears well up in his eyes. *That* he could feel. "There's good news?"

"You're alive and capable of some movement," All For One said quietly, "that's good news, is it not?"

"You think so?" Alive and in the hands of All For One. That was "good news". Izuku inhaled deeply, feeling the usual warm drip down his nose. He could deal with this… He could…

“Compared to how you were when I pulled you from the wreckage…” All For One trailed off and Izuku winced again, feeling the moisture being wiped away by a foreign hand. “For now, all you have to do is worry about recovering. Relax. I’ll take care of the rest.” But *why* was All For One taking care of the rest? What did this have to do with him?

“What about everyone else?” Izuku’s mother, All Might who was still probably injured from the encounter, Kacchan, his classmates… Was Izuku meant to just stop caring about them? Sit here and… well, he couldn’t twiddle his thumbs yet, but as soon as he could…

“What about them?” Cautious? Maybe slightly cutting. Izuku wasn’t sure what to call it.

“I don’t know what’s happening… Can I have a newspaper or something?” Anything. Izuku would take anything. “Do they know…?” *That I’m here?*

“They only know what witnesses would have seen, little Izuku, me pulling you from the rubble. As to what they infer… well, we’re not exactly on friendly terms.” It was careful, almost too careful.

No one’s coming, Izuku realised, flooded with a sense of calm. No one was going to going to take on All For One a second time because no one thought that he was still alive. All Might couldn’t do it without One For All. Ragdoll didn’t have Search to locate him and if All Might hadn’t found All For One the first time around then he must have hidden well enough for it not to be an issue. No one was coming. No one was going to die trying to save him. Izuku sobbed with relief.

“Regardless,” All For One whispered with finality, a hand cradling Izuku’s chin, “your death is *not* an acceptable outcome of your stay here.”

No one's coming.

Chapter End Notes

Here you go.

Captive

Chapter Summary

Hindsight truly is everything.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Captivity was a different experience. Different in that Izuku had been expecting a lot more… pain and suffering and general misery. At least that's what their textbooks and the internet said about pro heroes who had been captured by villains. The photos had been *graphic*, but that was to be expected from criminals. So far for Izuku, nothing that had happened was really that different to normal hospital care. If normal hospital care was being personally guided by Japan's most notorious supervillain. Izuku gingerly licked his lips. Nothing said it had to always be like that though, because it could always change. Izuku felt his fingers twitch. Most likely as soon as he stopped cooperating. Was he even cooperating now? Maybe? Who knew? Izuku didn't. What was there to cooperate with? There was nothing here so far that went against any of Izuku's moral principles. Not yet.

If Izuku was honest with himself, he wasn't even sure how he was meant to react to what was happening. He couldn't… he couldn't do anything… Completely at All For One's non-existent mercy waiting… waiting for what? No one's coming, not if they don't know that Izuku was still alive and if All For One's intended outcome wasn't an excruciating death… Waiting… just waiting… It was all he could do.

Izuku couldn't be sure how much time was passing as All For One flittered about the room. All For One wasn't volunteering it and Izuku wasn't asking through his sniffles. At least it was the assumption that All For One was doing *something* from the footsteps and brushing movements Izuku could hear after All For One had finally withdrawn from physical contact. All For One hadn't been quick about it either. Izuku didn't think his mother had even held onto him for so long after he'd been diagnosed Quirkless. At least it hadn't felt like it at the time. Now it was entirely too long, too foreign, too invasive. Too weird for anyone let alone the person doing it.

It wasn't helping the growing pressure on Izuku's chest that only escalated with every moment of contact. Or the moist itch around his

eyes from the wet fabric. Unable to do much more than twitch a finger, Izuku couldn't bat All For One away from the previous fluffing of pillows, tucking in of sheets, offered drinks or countless other details that were painting a vivid picture of enforced rest. He supposed he could say something… but was there a protocol to tell a villain who'd brought you back from the dead to stop fluffing your pillows? Izuku didn't remember reading about it in the manuals. There were strategies for coping with pain and torture resistance, but nothing like this, absolutely nothing. Izuku could feel dull aches and odd prickling sensations as well as the tug of the cannula with every spasm, but nothing that counted as traditional torture. There wasn't much on dealing with a kidnapper who was being overly nice to after, by his words, accidentally killing you (Izuku was setting new precedents every day, it felt like). Izuku couldn't see voicing an opinion doing much either, not from his previous experiences in dealing with regular adults. They never listened anyway.

In the meantime while his thoughts wandered, Izuku wasn't even left to his sniffles uninterrupted while All For One prowled the room. "You're dripping everywhere, you poor thing," All For One sighed, coming back into immediate range and Izuku felt something thick and soft fold over his head. "We blindfolded you after you almost clawed your eyes out the last time you woke up." There was a drawn quality to his voice. "It was unexpected, but the treatment caused you to become overly sensitive to light. You weren't in your right state of mind and we… restrained you. My apologies, but it was better than you losing your sight permanently." That was… strangely considerate of him if he wasn't lying. Izuku's own thoughts honed in on the mittens even as All For One's hands grazed his temples and tugged the blindfold away in slow pulls. Could it be he was telling the truth? The mittens were a detailed touch for a falsification.

"I can't see?" Izuku couldn't really shift to dislodge the fabric to check, but the large palm resting on his shoulder was doing far more to dissuade it. He couldn't see anything glinting through to confirm or deny All For One's assurances. All he had was the premier villain's word for his sight being less than competent and what was that worth? It was a lot of effort to fake it, Izuku supposed. It wouldn't be long before the pretence was dropped and Izuku was palmed off to some other minion and he wouldn't have to worry about the airs.

"We don't know yet, but I'm not inclined to have you suffer unnecessarily when you're still on the same treatment that caused your *reaction* in the first place."

If you don't want me to suffer unnecessarily, then why didn't you just leave me under the building? Izuku bitterly asked himself, because being forcefully dragged back from death by a supervillain wasn't an option most people would take. Not with the world of uncertainty it landed him in. At least Izuku thought he asked himself, then he heard a sharp intake of air and froze.

"You don't mean that," All For One stated, drying Izuku's face in slow deliberate motions. Almost painfully slow in its delicacy as All For One dabbed around Izuku's closed eyes. *Clawed at his eyes…* perhaps there was scarring Izuku hadn't noticed yet. Oddly, it only seem to encourage the water to pour more forcefully.

Izuku only thought for a little while, because there wasn't anything better to do. They were, admittedly, almost distant thoughts, because at this point they weren't going to have much of an impact on anything. Of his mother and All Might and his inability to see. Of dying. Of his twitching fingers and toes. Of All For One's proximity (for how long?). Of the coma. Of school and his friends. Of the unlikeliness that'd he would ever be able to be a pro a hero even if he did walk again. Twisting together into one writhing mass, the weight on his chest only grew. "I… I think do, actually," Izuku confirmed. The prospects weren't great even with Izuku surviving. What did All For One stand to gain when Izuku lost much as a default? "Why did you bother?" From Izuku's perspective, it didn't make any sense, but All For One's motives had the clarity of coal. Unless he wanted to gain Izuku's trust then have him suffer a slow and agonising death. That was still an option.

Izuku didn't remember the collapse. Whatever happened, it must have been on the quick and painless side of the scale and without the ability to get at All Might, perhaps this was the next best thing?

All For One's dabbing gestures halted. "That's a terrible thing to say," he murmured and Izuku felt chills run through him. "How can you say that?" Izuku could have sworn All For One sounded taken aback, but there wasn't much of a ground for comparison. Not when the only grounds were exchanged taunts in a death match. "*Why* are you saying that?" Followed in a much quieter whisper that Izuku almost missed.

Izuku shrugged noncommittally, flinching as a new blindfold was secured. Or at least he tried to, it was more of a half-hearted tremble. There wasn't any need to give him any more ammunition. Izuku shouldn't have said anything in the first place. All For One didn't

acquire an army of followers in the past by always being the supreme evil at any given time. He must have some capacity to pretend to be a normal person at some stage or another, but was it real? Only All For One knew and it wasn't something that Izuku was ever going to be a party to at any rate.

"I understand that you don't want to speak to me about why you would say such a thing… but surely your life is worth a second chance," All For One coaxed, uncovering Izuku's head.

Izuku shrugged again. Try as he might, no amount of jostling would expose light. Whatever All For One was using, it wasn't a discount blindfold.

"Just… think about it," All For One carried on, his hand moving away and Izuku's heart sagged with relief. "Stain, Muscular, Wolfram… All of the countless lives they had already ruined and would have continued to ruin if they didn't have the misfortune of running into you. Think of how much more you can do once you recover." Izuku could handle the mockery All For One turned at All Might. That had always been normal throughout Izuku's life. What he couldn't handle was that All For One sounded dangerously close to a normal person. There was no mocking lilt, no gentle caresses, just a calm, encouraging commentary that could have just as easily come from any passing person. Except… no passing person ever would have said that to Izuku. Except All For One was *the* supervillain and was the one saying it.

All For One sounded like what Izuku had always been told supportive people would sound like, only to find out that even his mother wasn't one of them. Was this one of the tricks of his trade? A mask? Shigaraki had clearly been strung along with some form of this, which only made Izuku's unsettled stomach feel even worse. Was was All For One encouraging Izuku's takedowns of villains? Weren't these people all connected to the man? Stain in particular had been heavily linked to the League, but Izuku hadn't recalled Stain ever saying that for himself…

Instead, Izuku cleared his throat. "What makes you think I had anything to do with Stain?" The media hadn't reported on Izuku's involvement with Stain. Much to the Todoroki household's collective consternation, Endeavor had been given the full credit. But hadn't Spinner also said something about Izuku and Stain in the forest? Wasn't there a suppression order on the whole thing? How did they find out about it?

“Please, little Izuku, Endeavor was nowhere near Stain. We even have video proof of that,” All For One chided. *Video? Who had a video?* “The police might be embarrassed by their inability to capture a serial killer, but that’s not an area we have to worry about.” We? Who was *we*? Criminals collectively? All For One and his underlings? “You should be proud of your achievements.”

“I-I am, just…” Not when it came from a mass murderer.

“Just not when it’s me pointing it out?” All For One asked far too wryly and Izuku cringed. All For One paused, almost coyly, “I suppose I shouldn’t tell you then, that you technically have the credit for the capture of the League of Villains as well?”

Izuku inhaled and almost gagged on his saliva. “WHAT?” The League of Villains captured? How was Izuku responsible for that? He hadn’t done anything!

“If you eat, I’ll tell you,” All For One smoothly interjected, as had probably been his plan from the onset. Outrage might have bubbled to the surface if Izuku had some means of expressing it. One For All wasn’t an option if Izuku couldn’t even move to use it. Who knew what it'd do to his arms?

“You’re *bribing* me?” It was a tempting one as well. Tempting in that Izuku really wanted to know what happened to All Might and Shigaraki was a possible pathway. That and the curdling in his stomach might not just be anxiety… but it was mostly anxiety. Maybe some hunger. If it was possible to still be hungry with All For One’s increasing bizarre behaviour.

“Hmm, I suppose I am. I’ll be back shortly. Slow and deep breaths.” Followed by footsteps and Izuku outright holding his breath. Were bribes normal? Was any of this normal? Food and information on Shigaraki? Recovery was lip service, an excuse, but All For One wasn’t behaving like it was anything but something he was taking seriously. Izuku was hours into being awake though, maybe it’d change?

At this point, who knows how many hours into wakefulness and captivity, Izuku would have physically thrown his arms up if he was physically capable of it. Right now All For One had deflected to food of all things, but why was he bothering? It always came back to that lynchpin. *Why did he save me? Why is he bothering? What happened to Shigaraki? Why didn’t he go after All Might? Where is All Might? What happened? Why? Why? Why?*

“You know, I said breaths as in the plural. You’re going to pass out,” All For One’s deep voice radiated back into being and Izuku gasped. A gust of air and Izuku was certain that All For One was in his usual spot once more. He needed information. He needed All For One to stop. Doing. That.

Maybe it was a new type of torture and interrogation tactic? Izuku sniffed the heat haze in front of him experimentally. It smelt like rice. It didn’t smell like much else though. Izuku supposed that some poisons didn’t have a smell or taste, but would All For One bother with poisoning someone he’d just admitted to dropping a building on? Izuku frowned. Maybe he would. Izuku didn’t really know all that much about All For One as a person or even as a villain. Just that someone who was alive for over eight generations of a Quirk probably wasn’t the best person to test his luck on.

“I’m fine with you feeding yourself in future, but…” All For One voice soothed, “you’re not quite there yet. We can work on it, of course, but…” His voice lingered and Izuku’s brain repeated what All For One said.

“*You’re* going to feed me?” Izuku repeated, knowing his knuckles were bone white beneath the sheets. “Don’t you have better things to do?” Izuku found himself asking, almost desperately. “Don’t you have, I don’t know, minions? Underlings?” Izuku frowned. “Subordinates?” Izuku tried. It sounded better. “Where are the League?” Not that Izuku really knew enough about the League to guess who’d be loaded with the thankless work of keeping a prisoner breathing. Shigaraki would either strangle him or disintegrate his throat in a fit of rage. “You said you’d tell me…”

There was a chuckle and Izuku jumped. “I think they’d be more likely to strangle you than feed you after the grief you’ve caused them.” Weren’t the League of Villains an extension of All For One? Shouldn’t Izuku be a problem to All For One as well then? “I’ll tell you after your food, as I said before.” Well, that was typical.

“Them?” Izuku probed. “Not you?”

“No, little one, not me,” Izuku was breezily assured. “Tomura was the one outraged by your presence.” And Izuku felt it as All For One spoke, the spoon nudging against his lower lip as if he was some invalid. Izuku’s lip wobbled in spite of itself. *I shouldn’t be here.*

Keep it together. Hold it together. Izuku wasn’t holding it together,

sniffling in spite of himself.

“It’s natural to be upset, little Izuku. It’s normal for people in your position to feel what you are, there’s nothing to be ashamed of in your circumstances. It’s not something I expect you to come to terms with in an afternoon.” If that wasn’t the most jarring thing Izuku had ever heard from the most jarring person, Izuku would eat his favourite All Might hoodie. It was too *reasonable* to come from someone who killed so many people over a grudge. How could All For One bounce from what he was at Kamino to *this*?

“Did this work on Shigaraki?” Izuku instead asked somewhat spitefully. He could not eat and be force fed, or he could eat and see if All For One really did answer Izuku’s question. So, with some hesitation, Izuku bit down on the spoon.

“Too well, I think,” All For One mumbled under breath and it took all Izuku’s will to make sure his food went towards his stomach and not his lungs. Was that an admission?

Izuku ate a glacial pace. The spoon that patiently rested near his lip until he was done chewing was almost surreal. “It’s so… bland.”

“I’d offer something more appealing than rice, but from my experience, your stomach wouldn’t cope with it just yet,” All For One offered… sympathetically.

Experience? What experience? Izuku wondered.

“All Might wasn’t the only one maimed in that encounter,” All For One explained, pressing another spoon to Izuku’s mortified lips. “He ripped so much away from me.” As the spoon dipped away, he spoke again, “they say that talking to yourself is the first sign of insanity, but in my experience it’s more of a testament to the loneliness of the individual. But if we’re going to fix that, please enunciate clearer.”

Izuku almost choked on his few remaining grains of rice, feeling what was left of his blood rush to his face. Of all of the things All For One had to comment on… “You still haven’t-”

“Yes, yes. I know,” he cut in. “Tomura didn’t leave when you did. He delayed and was captured while I retrieved you.” There wasn’t any hesitation. No sadness that Izuku could detect. Not the tiniest drop of remorse. Nothing. Kacchan was more enthusiastic when he used to talk about camping sleeping bags.

“You… you just left them there?” And All Might. All Might had to be okay, then!

“Yes.” No hesitation. No feeling.

“Why?” But leaving All Might? Leaving the chance to kill him? That didn't seem right.

“Why not? Tomura could have left any time he so desired once the gate was opened.” Still, nothing.

“But you of all people knew he wasn’t going to with All Might there,” Izuku pointed out. There was no way Shigaraki was going anywhere with a chance at All Might in front on him. Absolutely none. What made All For One change his priorities so quickly?

“Did I?”

“Yes.” All For One had thrown the entire League of Villains to the side, all to get Izuku’s lifeless body? Even with so little food in stomach, he already wanted to be ill. What did All For One know that Izuku didn’t?

“Oh well, in that case I guess the credit for them being securely in residence of Tartarus must go squarely to you, then, since you knew that All Might needed help and went there without his knowing in the first place,” flowed outwards and Izuku shook his head.

“You didn’t have to-”

“-Yes. I did,” he said simply and Izuku was once more at a loss. “More pressingly, I need to check those dressings of yours, because if they’ve started to stick again…”

“Dressings?” Izuku repeated, knowing his fingers were white from frustration as All For One changed topics yet again.

“You weren’t just crushed by the collapse. One of the lacerations was so deep that we had to be careful not to accidentally snap your spine in half whenever you were moved. Right now they’re slowly healing, but I can’t tell you whether or not there’ll be nerve damage following their full recovery. The process was rather… experimental and the results are unpredictable. If it was perfect your sight wouldn’t be the way it is,” All For One… babbled and Izuku for a brief moment wondered if this was what he sounded like to other people.

Dressings, repeated itself in Izuku's head. "Did-did you do the dressings?" Then he braced for the answer. What else had been done while Izuku was asleep? How many other surgical procedures that Izuku didn't know about?

"I did *everything*, little Izuku, apart from some of the more complex surgical procedures," All For One stressed. "I'm sure my doctor would have offered enthusiastic assistance, but there are some boundaries that he won't be crossing while you're here."

"Everything?" Izuku didn't think he'd been so absolutely petrified in his entire life. Not even when he was hanging on to All Might for dear life. How long had the coma been?

"*Everything*," All For One quietly confirmed, solidifying Izuku's fears. No wonder All For One had moved him so casually. It was a habit. "My brother, when he was younger, had his bad days. I'm not going to hurt you, but I have doubts about the good doctor at times. He was very curious about your blood results."

"Is he responsible for the Noumu?" Slipped from Izuku's dry mouth.

"Yes, he is, so you'll understand my concerns, I'm sure." Concerned would be putting it mildly. All For One's giving and taking of Quirks turned people into dolls according to All Might… which meant whoever this doctor was, he had to be the one turning them into monsters. And he was looking at Izuku's blood test results. Izuku was glad he was already green, hopefully All For One wouldn't be able to tell the difference.

"Maybe… maybe not him, then?" Izuku suggested, hoping he wasn't involved in some villainous implementation of good cop, bad cop.

"Yes, that was my response. Now, this is going to be uncomfortable and I can't really offer you anything to hold onto since I need both hands…"

Uncomfortable didn't begin to describe it, but Izuku didn't doubt in the slightest that All For One had been the only one taking care of them. There was nothing inexperienced in how the gaping wound on his back was pointed out to him, how it stretched from one side to the other. The explanation of the dressing process being irritating due the sheer size of the thing, that stubbornly refused to close up. Yes, All For One had definitely been the one responsible with the amount of frustration dripping from every word.

Izuku couldn't feel it at first, the plucking and tugging away of the adhesive on his skin as piece by piece it came away. Then it reached the wound and Izuku seized as what came away most definitely wasn't adhesive, even with whatever fluid was being used to ease the process along. It pulled. It wrenched. Izuku whimpered.

"You're okay, you're alright…" Izuku didn't feel okay, he could feel his eyes watering as it began to throb. "These wounds are unfortunately deep even with our best effort. Still oozing… What a surprise. Waterproof dressings are a wonderful invention," All For One murmured. But it didn't stop. It pulled. And pulled. And kept pulling, a never ending sensation and Izuku became acutely aware that perhaps any pain medication he'd been given might have worn off.

"Why… why are you-?" Izuku struggled out, feeling the brush of gloved hands. Izuku gave up. Talking was too much effort for the waves of nausea that came with every pulse of pain.

"I think it's in both of our interests if the good doctor isn't involved in dressing these… His bedside manner unfortunately hasn't improved over the years." There was something in All For One's voice that it had Izuku rapidly blinking beneath his blindfold. It reminded Izuku of when All For One had greeted Kacchan at Kamino. "As soon as I could take care of myself, I threw him out."

Snorting in spite of himself, Izuku jerked and flinched, part of something coming away with a hiss.

"Careful. Now, if you behave yourself, I might have another treat waiting for you…"

"I can't do much anyway," Izuku grumbled.

"But you might hurt his feelings and that would be dreadful."

It was extremely hard for Izuku to tell whether All For One was being serious or not. On one hand, a prospective bribe that might never be delivered, and on the other, a doctor who seemed to want to… experiment on Izuku. Even without the bribe, it was still for the best if Izuku just didn't say anything.

Even if Izuku had the distinct impression that All For One was itching for something to be said to this doctor. Why All For One didn't do it himself was anyone's guess.

For a moment, the doctor had wondered if the boy was catatonic again, but no, Midoriya was just entirely indifferent to his presence. Some people talked. Most begged. They did anything they could to avoid the silence. Midoriya seemed to revel in it. Or perhaps he just didn't care. As such, the doctor took his observations, careful to avoid the boy's blindfolded head. Miraculous as ever, but without more testing he had no explanation for the possibility of the recovery. Most people didn't recover. Not to this extent.

Midoriya shouldn't be alive and Sensei didn't seem to be sharing any secrets on what made this different. Sensei had his reasons, as always, but his unwillingness to share them was grating.

"Any questions?" Not that he was expecting any. The boy hadn't said a word so far.

"Why am I here?" Whispered the child and the doctor paused in his tracks. Midoriya didn't sound how he once did, he was nowhere near as lively. Death did that to people. How long had it been since his last visit? Midoriya hadn't come back after that appointment...

But it was a good question. An unexpected one, but a good one. The doctor didn't have the answer to that. Sometimes he wondered if even Sensei had the answer to it. Everything so far hinged on keeping the boy alive, but to what end? If it was for the mere Quirk then surely Sensei could deprive him of it at his leisure. In the same way that society could be toppled far more efficiently without Shigaraki's involvement, but still Sensei drove him on… unless Midoriya was wanted for more than his Quirk. It was an uncomfortable possibility.

"That is an excellent question, Midoriya. I was hoping you could provide me with some insight," the doctor frowned.

"He hasn't said anything to you?" Midoriya was frowning himself from the way the blindfold shifted. Interesting. Both of them were in the dark.

"No. You're completely unaware of a possible reason?" The doctor tapped his clipboard and Midoriya shrugged.

"I can think of some… but, he dropped a building on me," Midoriya said as though it explained everything. In all fairness, to a degree it

did. Those who Sensei targeted seldom walked away from the experience let alone were treated for it… unless… was what happened to Midoriya an accident? “That should have been the end of it,” Midoriya said with chilling finality, nestling further into his sheets as well as he was able with a sigh. It was a sad gesture, so lacking in movement, something with more reflex than genuine care that the doctor almost winced.

“What about an accident?” The doctor pushed.

Midoriya paused. “Maybe.” Midoriya made a noise of contemplation. “Even if he did I don’t think he’d care enough to bring me back.” Indifference, followed by a small smile. “I’m nobody important.” The doctor very much so doubted that from his own sleepless nights, Sensei’s constant hovering, the extremes that both had gone to keep the fragile husk of a child from expiring. So much effort hadn’t gone into any procedure since Sensei’s own near demise. Clearly not a nobody.

“I very much so doubt that. Your accommodation would be very different if you were a nobody.” As would the treatment.

“For now,” Midoriya murmured, “but I don’t know much longer that’ll last for…” Midoriya exhaled quietly. A possibility, certainly, but this much effort only to let the boy die anyway? It seemed too kind a fate if Sensei had something particular in mind.

“You’re not going to be let off that easily,” the doctor noted. Nobody who owed Sensei anything ever did get off particularly easily…

“He doesn’t get to make that decision,” Midoriya yawned. “I was okay, you know… with him just leaving me there. I don’t owe him anything after he killed me. It would have been better if he just… left me.” Buried in tonnes of concrete rubble, lacerated, lungs hardened with dust, almost bisected, with most of his bones and skull shattered. That Midoriya still considered it preferable… “Instead I’m here.” It did speak of prior history.

“But you’re alive.” Blind, battered and in questionable condition, but there were some prospects of recovery. Not great prospects, but prospects nonetheless.

Midoriya shrugged. “This isn’t living.” In that instant, the doctor was filled with a sense of dread. That… wasn’t what Sensei was going to want to hear. The assumption had been that Midoriya was a standard teenager, but this… this wasn’t right.

It was such an apt statement that for a brief moment, the doctor wondered if the child knew, if perhaps Sensei had told him what exactly had happened. He doubted it, Sensei hardly seemed to want to cover the topic himself, but this wasn't what was expected. It didn't meet his assumptions about what a standard child experienced. Why was this one so different? What had happened in the intervening time period? What had changed little Izuku into the teenager now?

Instead, the doctor made a note on his clipboard. "Very well, is there anything else?"

"You're Doctor Tsubasa, aren't you?" The boy's ragged voice whispered and the doctor froze. He remembers. He was so young. He still is young. "I remember you." A foreboding pause. "I'm not surprised that you're here." The doctor recoiled. For six words, the boy may as well have lashed him with a terrifying familiarity. "What happened to your grandson?"

"I-I have nothing to say to you on that topic." Nothing that he could say. Nothing that he wanted to think about.

And the doctor fled. To give Sensei the bad news. To hide from another from sightless gaze that tolerated no excuses.

"I take that it went smoothly," All For One asked in what Izuku assumed was a hopeful tone of voice.

Izuku had mixed feelings on how the meeting with his old doctor had gone. Objectively speaking, he was confident his blood pressure was double what it had been before the man had entered the room. Izuku was never going to forget the voice, the indifference, his mother's reaction to it… Never. "Is seeing him going to be normal?"

"Not for you, no." Izuku's relief must have been audible or visible because he heard All For One's brief chortle. "Yes, I'm sympathetic, but he has a somewhat unique skillset."

In any normal situation, Izuku might have quizzed All For One on the elder Tsubasa's skillset, but a far older problem gnawed at him. "Do you know what happened to his grandson?" Izuku found himself asking, lips moving before he could stop them. He didn't really have anything to lose at this point. "I-I used to go to school with him in

elementary school, but for some reason he didn't come to middle school with Kacchan or me. Mum asked, but I don't think she could find the family because they moved…"

Izuku heard a mild noise of contemplation. "An interesting question." A pause. "Were you friends with his grandson?"

Frowning, Izuku thought to himself. He could lie about it, but there wasn't anything to gain from it when the grandfather was there to dispute it. There were no friends in this building. "Not friends, technically. Tsubasa had wings, you see. It was weird, because he could float even without beating them, so he had some suspension of the normal laws of physics when he used them and he had agility with them that other people with similar Quirks didn't. I wrote notes on them and he thought I was insulting him. Um, he used to chase me using them. Him and Kacchan's other," Izuku felt for a word, "friends," he finished lamely. Tsubasa's disappearance arguably made Izuku's life at school much easier. It opened up a world of new hiding places that Kacchan and his other minions couldn't spot without an aerial perspective. That didn't mean Izuku wasn't curious. "But when he didn't go with us…"

"Being a clever child, you were curious," All For One concluded, almost eagerly. Izuku really didn't like the sound of that. "His grandson was one of the few joys in his life, for all the time spent in his work. I was often regaled with stories his schooling activities against my consent," All For One irritably noted and there was a rush of air as he reclaimed his perch next to Izuku. Followed by Izuku almost jumping a foot into the air as All For One fluffed his pillows. Again.

That still didn't answer the question. "But why didn't he go to our school?"

"His family moved, that I know."

All For One had already given himself away. Tsubasa overshared information, which means All For One definitely knew more than he was letting on. "I don't think you're telling me the whole story."

"I'm not going to get anything past you, am I?" Delighted. Izuku would call that voice delighted. Something else was happening here and that threw Izuku more than the prospect of a gruesome death. "It's something you best ask the doctor." Likely because the villain knew full well that Tsubasa didn't want to talk about it, but it did

make Izuku's heart sink. The younger Tsubasa's reason for moving wasn't going to be a happy one. "But I have your promised bribe in the meantime."

Bribe? "You were serious?"

"Of course. I told you about Tomura's mishap before, didn't I?" Well, he had, but that was no guarantee that it was going to a be a continuing thing. There was a click and Izuku heard another voice that almost made him weep with relief.

"Weeeelcoooooome, listeners to your Friday night! Music all night, every night as we count dow-" and with another click Present Mic's screech was gone.

A radio. All For One's bribe was a radio. Izuku's jaw dropped. Even the music stations had regular news coverage. Izuku would be able to follow what was happening outside. Even if the call in or dedicated news stations weren't possible, there was still something. It was something!

"Now, this is a conditional bribe, little Izuku," All For One sternly began, placing the device on the sideboard next to Izuku's bed with a *clack*.

Immediately, the hair on the back of Izuku's neck rose. "What sort of conditions?"

"You have to be able to turn it on and use it yourself." Izuku could almost hear the toothy smile and felt his fingers furiously twitch. If that wasn't a challenge, Izuku didn't know what it was.

"Is… is that really it?" If something seems too good to be true, it usually is and All For One had the advantage if he starved Izuku for information. Unless, there was some other factor in consideration that Izuku had missed.

"That's it," All For One airly called. "If you can use it, it's yours to keep. Provided you continue to eat, of course," All For One darkly added. What would make him think that was going to be a problem? There wasn't a reason to not eat, yet.

"I think… I think I can do that." *While I figure out how you're going to kill me next time.*

"Good, good. More importantly, what were you saying about the

younger Tsubasa's Quirk?"

Only then did Izuku remember that waxing poetic about Quirks to someone who could steal them probably wasn't the best idea.

Sansa was always told that he had the face of the cat that ate the canary. Having set eyes on Toshinori Yagi, he had the feeling that *he* was the canary. Shadowed eyes stared him down from across the new detective's desk where skeletal arms clad in navy blue, almost black, sat neatly folded. Whispers had followed both the newbie and Tsukauchi from the ground floor up to his office. Whispers that were still going and the more Sansa saw of the Yagi, the less he saw them stopping.

Four decades of experience in consulting, can you believe that? Where were they hiding this guy?

Did you see his qualifications? American. Is he even a native or is he an import? Yagi's native passing response about speaking Japanese fluently corrected that assumption, to the humiliation of the man's junior. Not that Yagi even stopped to look at the person he verbally treaded on.

I heard he used to work for All Might.

Screw that, I heard he was the brains of All Might's entire operation. If he's here All Might must be retiring. Wonder if Nighteye's agency knows anything? I should give them a call.

Change of career then? Why our humble abode? He could get a job anywhere.

A little birdie told me he was into big game hunting.

Shit… You don't mean that asshole who was at Kamino? Is this guy fucking crazy? Even the higher ups don't want to touch that with All Might MIA.

Who's the poor bastard assigned with him?

Tsukauchi, naturally. Hope he knows what he's getting into, because this

guy outranks him in the experience department. Any orders he takes are because he feels like it, even management seems hesitant around him.

I read his resume. You should have seen the amount of arrests this guy has behind in America and here while he worked for intel. All the people I asked at Might Tower swore the guy was a coffee runner. Holy shit. Yagi had grinned at that one. All teeth, no smile. It made the whole floor nearly soil themselves in terror.

You think his resume's fucking scary? They had him do a test interrogation with some low level thug. He almost dropped the guy with a fucking heart attack twenty seconds in. Nobody knows how either, because that's not his fucking Quirk. What the fuck.

They were taking bets on when he was going to get Tsukauchi killed going after the boss of the League of Villains, All For One. To Tsukauchi's credit, he made polite conversation with his stony faced colleague as he led him throughout the building. Yagi made everyone else a nervous wreck, but Tsukauchi didn't even seem to notice the aura of menace that hung off the blond.

Personally, Sansa was just up here to offer Tsukauchi's new partner in crime fighting a coffee. Both of them were going to need it with them after the Shigaraki case was dropped on them. But now… now he wanted to close his still open mouth and get the hell out of there as fast as humanly possible.

"May I help you, Tamakawa?" Yagi's deep voice rolled across the space.

Sansa gulped. "Erm, yeah, hi Yagi, just wanted to know if you wanted a coffee from across the street?" Sansa rushed out.

Yagi stared at him inscrutably. Sansa felt his fur stand on end. "I appreciate the offer, Tamakawa, but I have a great deal of work to do." And Yagi looked away and he was dismissed.

Sansa should have taken the opportunity to leave, he should, but… "Yagi, it's your first day. You're allowed to take it easy."

"Quite, but does that mean that I should, Tamakawa?" Sansa was either shrinking or Yagi was getting taller, his voice carefully even, unchanging, almost apathetic. "Izuku Midoriya's mother is still waiting for an update on her son, who for some reason, has been listed as missing instead of deceased. I have interviews to schedule with witnesses of the boy's death, CCTV footage to acquire and a

meeting with the coroner to arrange a death certificate. Only then can she be comfortable in holding some sort of ceremony after the boy's death, following him saving the lives of his classmates I might add." Yagi stood and Sansa reflexively took a step back. *Tall! Too tall.*

"To make matters worse, Katsuki Bakugou claims that Izuku Midoriya's body was stolen by the leader of the League of Villains. If this is correct, an investigation will have to be opened into the theft of the boy's body and his mother will have to be informed. That's not even covering the interrogations that have to be conducted of Shigaraki and his ilk. Now tell me Tamakawa, should I take it easy on my first day or should I perhaps do my job?"

Piercing blue eyes stared through Sansa, Yagi leaning heavily on his desk, his voice still perfectly even and it was all Sansa could do not to whimper. "No, sir, I'll leave you to do your job, sir."

"I'm glad we understand each other. I might take you up on that offer some other time though," Yagi stated with another indifferent wave of his hand.

Sansa fled the room. He was ashamed to admit it, but his reaction wouldn't have helped those whispers that continued to stalk Yagi throughout the halls in a dark cloud.

Tomura Shigaraki was thoroughly sick and tired of the white walls, the white ceiling, the white rims on the white reflection of still whiteish glass, the white straitjacket and the white everything. He didn't think he'd been more bored in his entire life. There was that one time he'd played Spider Solitaire which was a close second, but even it wasn't anywhere near as dreary as Detective Tsukauchi who sat opposite the glass. Tsukauchi who appeared whenever he felt like it, without warning, without rhyme or reason. Who. Never. Shut. Up. Tomura wanted to pull his hair out. At least the screams might vary, because his tone of voice sure as hell didn't.

"Still not feeling very talkative, huh?" What felt like an eternity hadn't made the "friendly chats", as Tsukauchi called them, anymore pleasant. Tsukauchi wanted information on Sensei and it was a cold day in hell before Tomura had anything to tell the police or their pets

the pro heroes about Sensei.

Where is All For One?

What does he want?

What are his motivations?

What is his end goal?

Why is he so obsessed with killing All Might?

Did All For One ever mention Izuku Midoriya? Tomura almost cracked a tooth thinking about that last one. As if Sensei would deign to waste his time on that brat.

How long has the League of Villains existed?

Who is your supplier?

Are you the leader?

Who manages the money?

And on and on it went, but more importantly, Sensei hadn't been captured! But surely… surely Sensei would come back for him… right? Tsukauchi implied that Sensei was free. That meant Sensei was free to come and rescue him from this boredom. So where was he and why was it taking so long? Perhaps he'd been injured even further by All Might and that again only made Tomura clench his teeth even harder.

"What do you think?" Tomura snapped. "I have nothing to say to you."

"You just did," Tsukauchi lazily pointed out from behind a newspaper? Was that… was that the sporting insert of the newspaper? Was he seriously reading about *a fucking baseball game* during an interrogation? "Say something to me. I mean, I've had better conversations with brick walls, but it's something, I guess."

"Shut up," Tomura snarled through gritted teeth. This was All Might's fault. All of it was All Might's fault. It was All Might's fault that Sensei suddenly left in the midst of the battle without a word. It was *his fault*. All of this was that bastard's fault.

"Careful, Shigaraki, you keep grinding your teeth like that and they'll

muzzle you again and you don't want that for your big day," Tsukauchi yawned, rising to his feet.

Tomura shuddered. A mouth guard. They forced a mouth guard between his teeth like he was some common animal then they sedated him. That's what they usually did. He was already bound to a chair. What did these idiots think he was going to do with turrets trained on him? He couldn't do anything, but Sensei could. Sensei when he finally came. How long had it been? But… "Big day? What the hell are you talking about?"

"You'll be pleased to know that my superiors finally gave me a buddy!" Tsukauchi's haggard face cracked into a bright smile. It was the first and only time Tomura had seen the detective smile in the too white prison. It made him want to latch on with all five fingers and make that expression disappear for good.

Tomura snorted derisively. "Who cares?"

"You do, because he's been assigned to all of my cases, including yours," Tsukauchi nodded. "His desk is setup, already covered in files and he is ready to go."

"As if some noob scrub can handle someone of my level," Tomura drawled. A junior. In here. Sif. They'd have to grind on the trash in the lower security prisons before they had a chance here.

"To the contrary, he's been in the business longer than I have, but he worked in a specialised third consultancy wing for the police. His employer recently released him from that contract so he could work for us directly. He's very eager to start work," Tsukauchi nodded, his head bobbing up and down so fast that Tomura wanted to kick it off.

"Not like he'll get very far, will he?" Tomura found himself sneering back.

"Oh, I don't know about that. He likes All Might more than you do. I'm sure that you'll have a lot in common." Tomura wanted to melt the smug smirk off his face.

"I doubt that."

Tsukauchi's white teeth only seemed to gleam whiter and Tomura wanted to scream, for all the good that was going to do.

Where are you, Sensei?

It was all Toshinori could do not to grimace. Secreted in the comfort of his kitchen, he could drop the role that young Bakugou had lovingly created for him. Not the word Toshinori would usually apply to anything Bakugou did, but the boy had chosen every word in that resume carefully and taken notes. Finally, at the end he had been presented with a notebook titled *Career Analysis For the Future* and Toshinori held in tears while the boy stubbornly avoided eye contact.

It was filled with tiny details on behaviour, responses, facial expressions, backstory explanations, an entire guidebook to Toshinori Yagi's entirely plausible (if slightly misleading) life that ran in parallel to All Might. It even had a dedicated section on his cover as a coffee runner at Might Tower. Young Midoriya would have loved that book.

"Are you sure moving him into a lower security area is a good idea?" That was the plan so far. Shigaraki felt safe knowing none of his interrogators could reach him. Apparently, it was quite the issue with the higher security Tartarus prisoners who liked to mock and goad their interrogators. Toshinori had been largely joking when he suggested they shove Shigaraki into a standard interrogation room and play good cop, bad cop for real. It came as a huge surprise to both Toshinori and Tsukauchi when their bosses and head warden from Tartarus gave the go ahead.

"Not really, but with his hands tied together he's not much of a threat," Tsukauchi explained with the wave of a coffee mug in one hand and some cheap cake in another. "They're more worried about what you are going to do to him from what the Chief said after the induction. They're even going to assign some guards."

"If he's restrained I don't think we're going to need the guards." If worst came to worst, Toshinori still had enough juice to rip Shigaraki's head clean off his shoulders before he could hurt anyone if it was needed. Shigaraki was already responsible for the deaths of everyone at Kamino when he involved All For One, including young Midoriya. Toshinori couldn't see himself losing any sleep over that act of self defence.

"They're to restrain you, not him," Tsukauchi grunted from around his cake.

“Oh.” Toshinori thought back to his interview and smiled. “I suppose I did make a bit of an impression in the demonstration, didn’t I?”

“What were you thinking of to even do that?” Tsukauchi asked after a swallow of coffee.

“Hmm, interviewing All For One.” And then ripping up the table from the floor and beating him with it for robbing young Midoriya of his full and happy lifespan. “Young Bakugou’s notes said that I should maintain a more unapproachable air for my cover.”

“He’s not wrong, but did you have to scare Tamakawa so badly?” Tsukauchi sighed.

Toshinori shrugged helplessly.

If only young Midoriya was around to give his view on this situation...

Chapter End Notes

> And another. Since people have been asking, this is likely to be finished before WOAC is posted.

Quirks

Chapter Summary

What's the difference between a quirk and a Quirk?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Imperfect. All of them were, the patterns weren't lining up, the central dolls didn't quite fit… Momo's matryoshka dolls sat listlessly about her as she poured them out. Green. All of them were green. All of them a specific shade of green. Happy faces, then sad faces, then entirely faceless. Some of them patterned with chunks of falling stone. Imperfect.

Momo had never had this problem before as she pulled out another imperfect doll from her stomach. This one had rivers of tears running down its face in blue paint. Her hands shook.

"Honey… are you alright?" Her mother asked from the doorway of her bedroom. Midoriya… Midoriya hadn't ever visited her home, had he? He wasn't with the others when they came for the study group… Never saw her dining room, never drank their tea, never asked him about his notebooks he wrote in during the Sport Festival, never really spoke… Now they never would. It was too late. "Momo? Come and eat honey, you've been going all afternoon."

"I-in a minute," Momo responded after a delay, watching doll after doll fall to the ground. Some of them broke, their wooden casings so fragile.

"I'll give you ten, then I'll come back and check, alright?"

"Yes." Momo's mother stepped away and Momo was left to her thoughts. She was fighting a losing battle and erupted into quiet sobs.

Bakugou said it had only taken a minute. Midoriya was there… and then he wasn't. A building toppled, him pushing the others out the way *knowing* what was going to happen. He had to know, but he still did it anyway. Midoriya never made it out of U.A., would never have another conversation with any of them, would never become a pro even though he died a hero, would never achieve his dreams. His mother would cry over his empty grave for what she lost, like the how

class stared shellshocked at his empty seat in class as Aizawa-sensei realised that perhaps it was for the best if they had a break.

And it was all Momo's fault. She could have said no, could have refused to give them the tracker. Refused to help… but then Bakugou would have died. Kirishima, Todoroki and Midoriya's lack of trust in the pro heroes was correct. All Might, held up as he was with the boss of the villains, never would have reached Bakugou and Bakugou, tired from the camp, didn't have the energy to do anymore than stall his attackers. It was a foregone conclusion if they *hadn't* been there, but was it worth it? They had exchanged one possibility for a definite. Bakugou's potential death for Midoriya's definite death. It didn't feel worth it, neither of them should have died, but one had *died*.

She had watched the aftermath, trying to capture the moment it had all gone wrong. All she had was conjecture for All For One had toppled many buildings and they just so happened to be under one of them. It was almost a freak accident. It didn't look deliberate so much as negligent and All for One had sniped one of the escapees from his trap without even realising it. Not until it was too late.

Bakugou said that the villain had stolen Midoriya's body. Closed Midoriya's empty eyes and carried his broken body away. All For One who had given Midoriya his Quirk if Bakugou was right. To what end, Momo didn't want to imagine. Midoriya was as terrified of him as any of them. She could remember being told about the rows of bodies in tubes in the warehouse and breathed in slowly and deeply.

Momo had seen it then, clearer than ever, Bakugou's rage spilling forth as he told them why Midoriya's funeral would be delayed. The police concealing the death, his parents forbidding him from telling Midoriya's mother, All Might's disappearance from the public eye. Waxing and waning without control, into explosive outbursts. Monoma had been a victim of one of those outbursts. He'd approached them at lunch to gloat, but he hadn't known. No one in 1-B could have known, not with the police hiding Midoriya's death and not without missing Bakugou's declaration before class had started. But it happened anyway.

"Where's Midoriya? Maybe he ran awa-" and Monoma never finished the sentence. Bakugou issued an explosive uppercut so hard that Monoma bounced off the cafeteria's ceiling and back to the floor with a a crunch. Kirishima hadn't made it time. Todoroki had smirked. Ida wasn't there to lecture them. Midoriya wasn't there to stop Bakugou and never would be again. And Momo? Momo had just watched with

everyone else, feeling absolutely nothing.

She hadn't made it in time and the more she thought about it, the more she realised that she didn't want to, because they all had time to reach Bakugou before he struck… but… Monoma wasn't worth it. Monoma could have avoided it. That level of self-control was well beyond Bakugou now, but no one in 1-B had bothered to so much as ask about Midoriya.

"Does anyone else want to talk shit about Deku? You may as well haul your fucking arses over now while I'm in the mood to-." He hadn't gotten the chance to finish the sentence, passing out in Midnight-sensei's arms.

"I'll talk to Bakugou. Can you please take Monoma to Recovery Girl?" Midnight sighed and effortlessly lifted Bakugou and hoisted him from the cafeteria. To the principal's office, no doubt.

1-A watched and said nothing. Uraraka's face was set in a deep frown. Asui was as expressionless as ever, but her gaze towards 1-B was anything but friendly. Kaminari and Mineta were making a token effort to see if Monoma was still breathing, grimacing all the while. Satou had offered to carry Monoma to Recovery Girl. And Momo did nothing but watch while Kendou made her way over.

It was salt in the wounds, for someone to even suggest that Midoriya would run away when he chose to stay behind. It was farcical when he died doing the opposite. Now there wasn't even a body left to bury and all Momo could do was sit and reflect, because it wasn't good enough. It was her fault. She had to do *something*.

She didn't know what she could do. Bakugou was out for blood, as was Todoroki. Kirishima was attempting to find out what Bakugou was doing. Ida wasn't contactable. The rest of the class was still reeling and, even after classes had resumed, the five hadn't turned for their various reasons. Momo couldn't look at Midoriya's empty seat. It made her think of the equally empty burial site. An empty grave.

Perhaps… perhaps the dolls had a purpose after all and Momo began to gather them. It was something, better than the numbness and uncertainty that haunted her every step.

Katsuki was bouncing a rubber ball off All Might's wall. He didn't give a shit what the neighbours thought of it. Pricks. All Might himself was

hunched over a huge file of papers from the police station, a corkboard filled with multicoloured string hanging behind him. There was enough red for it to almost pass for a stringy murder scene itself and that was just All For One's involvement. The dark green was Deku, more muted and Katsuki averted his eyes. There wasn't as much green as there was red.

So far so fucking good. Nobody suspected that All Might and Toshinori Yagi were the same person. There was going to be hell to pay if anyone worked out that his Quirk was gone. *My fault. My fucking fault.* Katsuki hurled the ball and it smacked into the wall with a satisfying thud.

Every single criminal bastard and their mother would stream out the woodwork, all wanting to be the hottest shit with no All Might to smash their teeth in. And who was gonna stop them? Endeavor? Fuck no. Bastard couldn't handle his own son giving him shit let alone what turned up at the USJ. Endeavor and the current top brass would've had their shit pushed so far in that an area of medical study would have sprung out the ground to deal with it. They couldn't handle All For One now and Katsuki didn't see that changing in the near future.

That was with All For One doing fuck knows what. Unbidden, Katsuki could see the masked bastard leaning over the body, closing Deku's glassey eyes and - THWAP- jerked as the ball collided solidly with his head. Katsuki grunted and snatched the ball mid bounce. Fucking Deku would have known what was going on.

"What's the deal with All For One?" Katsuki grunted instead, shaking away the image. "Anything new?"

"Not a great deal. All For One has been missing from our radar for some time now. I've…" Katsuki watched All Might swallow heavily. "I've been looking at other missing person reports in addition to young Midoriya's…"

All Might was doing what both Tsukauchi and Katsuki had agreed upon. All For One left a trail of victims whenever he used his Quirk. He was easy to find when people bothered to look and that was how All Might found him the last few times. Follow the bodies and maybe they'd find out what that prick did with Deku's body.

"And? Is that bastard still around, stealing Quirks?" Katsuki growled, leaning forward as he did so. All For One left trails of Quirkless, maimed or otherwise experimented on people behind him. That much

he knew from peeking at All Might's files. It made his stomach fucking churn. A cold steel table… a fucking tube… with Deku limply floating in it, that's all Katsuki could see.

Had Deku saved Katsuki from one of those fucking tubes? Had Deku known what was coming next? For him not to trust All Might or the other pros, because he knew what they didn't about All Might's injury. Did he know about the Noumu before the rest of them? Katsuki swallowed heavily. Deku seemed to know shit about everything, especially if it was connected to All Might…

That masked bastard had no use for a corpse. No known use. Katsuki had spent just enough time squinting at the section of the debrief on the Noumu to realise that him taking a corpse was out of character. It didn't make him feel any better about what happened to Deku. Maybe Deku's death had given that murdering fuckwit some inspiration for a new line of assholery.

"If he is, I don't know what to make of his choice of victims…" All Might was frowning and Katsuki didn't think he'd seen something so wrong appearing in his life. It was unnatural. "These Quirks are peculiar and are the only ones I have so far where it seems to be him. The rest have other other suspects. One for the numbing of pain, another for paralysis… Another for electrical currents. There's another one here that allowed its holder to place someone into suspended animation… I honestly don't know if these are connected to him, but these are missing perpetrators. He was making Noumu before without these Quirks," All Might gestured in frustration.

Meanwhile, the Quirks were playing in Katsuki's head. Pain numbing. Paralysis. Electrical currents. Suspended Animation. He was fucking positive Deku would have dived on them if he was still around. But he wasn't. He died, because Katsuki was too slow and too fucking useless to save him. "All Might, could any of those have medical applications? You hit him pretty fucking hard, he was shaking his hand after the first blow." All For One definitely felt the first round of blows. Anyone who could take All Might on head to head was hardly fucking human by Katsuki's estimates. Bastard was in good enough shape to steal a body from the rubble after the fact as well.

"Possibly, but why Suspended Animation?" All Might scratched his head. "These don't line up."

"It sounds like he wants to store something or someone if you ask me," Katsuki grunted. Paralysis to keep them from moving, electrical

currents for… fucked if he knew, nerves maybe? Pain numbing to keep them from feeling whatever the hell he was going to do to them. Suspended Animation meant he wanted to keep something. “Can’t be Deku though, Deku’s dead. *Can* he bring back the dead?” That thought was fucking messed up as well, but someone had to ask it.

“Only himself, as far as I know,” All Might sighed. “Other people are his pawns. He never went to any lengths before to save people, not when he had legions of disposable pawns. I can’t see him starting now.” Then what was different about Deku? Deku was Quirkless up until… up until All Might handed over the Quirk.

“Does… does he know about Deku’s Quirk?” Katsuki realised with a mounting horror.

All Might paused, the colour draining from his face. “Shit.”

It was at that moment that Katsuki decided that some more research on Quirks was in fucking order.

The perp was crying. Honest to god bawling his eyes out across from the the blond haired man with icy blue eyes that just stared through people rather than at them. Positioned in a chair mere inches from the accused, Yagi was close enough to lick the man’s eyeballs if he chose to… and with what was happening now, it was starting to look like a possibility.

“I’m not particularly interested in helping you, Mr Ito. That’s Detective Tsukauchi’s deal, he’s all about understanding and helping people. Me though,” Sansa watched in horror as Yagi gazed down from an insurmountable height over clasped hands, “I’m more interested in the truth.”

“I-I-I,” the small man with round glasses was trembling so violently that his glass of water wobbled violently despite the table being bolted to the floor. Sansa knew for a fact that all of his colleagues held nothing but the deepest contempt for accused child killers… but Yagi was something else. Yagi was banned from dealing with those with heart problems for good reason. Sansa could feel the ill intent leak from the room like it was a tangible presence. Mr Ito’s chair was going to have to be thrown out after it was drowned with disinfectant. Though he had a sneaking suspicion that his room, hidden behind the mirror, was going to need much the same due to some of its pale occupants. If he hadn’t already known what Yagi was like prior to this

demonstration, he would have been in the same boat.

“Japanese, Mr Ito, requires that you speak in whole, coherent sentences,” Yagi delivered so frostily that Sansa wouldn’t have been surprised to see the window ice over. “Do you speak Japanese, or have you lost the ability?”

After all, no one knew Yagi’s Quirk. No one really wanted to either. Yagi, despite his lithe form, snapped another accused’s arm like a twig after the man had charged at Tsukauchi with a weapon. Dropped him to the floor in a lock with the broken arm forced into an angle was entirely too wrong for a human to look at let alone have done to them.

Yagi’s expression hadn’t changed. Hadn’t twitched, not even blinked as his fist solidly landed itself into the accused’s stomach on their way to the floor. The presumed weapon tumbled from the man’s hands and Tsukauchi moved to fully restrain the bloodied mess on the floor. They were still waiting on the labs to identify whatever the accused was holding, but those screams were never going to leave the police watching. Nor was Yagi’s indifference.

Giran was his name, some prolific fixer who had connections to the League of Villains and had supplied them with illegal Support items and cannon fodder previously. Not that he ever would again. The moment Giran’s arm had been corrected and set into a cast, he was shoved back into the room with Yagi at the Chief’s orders and the interrogation had resumed. Giran sang like a bird. Every phone, every contact, every location. Even a snippet on the poor Midoriya who died at Kamino and how much Shigaraki hated him. Yagi had grinned at that, like a shark did when scenting blood. Nothing but sharp teeth and pain as Giran was pushed for details, fully aware that no one was coming to save him, not with All For One off the grid.

“What the fuck is this guy’s problem?” One of his paler colleagues grunted from behind him. Sansa knew he wasn’t referring to Mr Ito, but Yagi who was eyeing off the man as if he were an unctuous piece of dirt attached to his shoe instead of a human being. Azuma hadn’t been in Giran’s interrogation or Yagi’s behaviour wouldn’t have come as a surprise. Yagi, out of all of them, loathed offenders where children were the victims. It was one of his redeeming qualities, one of the few that all of the police agreed on in debate.

“Mr Ito, where were you last Thursday night, between 6pm and 9pm?” Yagi repeated, still inches from Mr Ito’s face.

“I was at home!” Mr Ito shrieked. “Ask my wife!”

Yagi grinned, flesh peeling back from his teeth. “Really? That’s interesting… Will she confirm that?”

“Yes! Of course she will,” Mr Ito, leaning back as far away from Yagi as was possible, snarled.

“Yeah, I don’t think so,” Yagi casually remarked. How he did that while almost being up Mr Ito’s nostril was beyond Sansa. Of course the wife wasn’t going to confirm it though, she was the one who had reported her husbands suspicious absences occurring during the same time frames as the children disappearing. Turns out Yagi’s suggestion to plaster the case all over the media had been the right suggestion after all… and the deeper they dived the worse it appeared for Mr Ito. As it turned out, Mrs Ito’s keen memory stemmed from her husband’s constant disappearances during key family events. Family events which others also recalled that he wasn’t present in attendance. Family events that lined up with the missing children.

“You missed your wedding anniversary dinner with her you know, she’s still very upset,” Yagi added. “She was waiting for hours, sent texts, called and you never answered.”

“That’s a lie!” Mr Ito screamed back at the unmoving Yagi.

“How about your mother-in-law’s birthday? You weren’t there for that either,” Yagi tutted, opening the folder on the table and revealing the expansive phone records of Mrs Ito. “Or your son’s baseball grand final, or the family New Year’s party, or even your own promotion party. So Mr Ito, *where were you?*” They already knew where he was, they had already found the bodies after all thanks to the help of the rest of his family. A quiet spot in the woods local to his house where he liked to “reflect” as his wife had scornfully put it. The only thing they were missing was the why.

Ito cracked like an egg. All drool and mucus, wailing in front of the unsympathetic Yagi’s unrelenting barrage. “They deserved it!”

“Really, Mr Ito? How did they deserve it exactly? Did they not get off your lawn when you told them to?” Yagi drawled.

“They bullied my son!” Mr Ito lunged for Yagi and found himself pinned to the table by his throat, gasping for air.

“Uh, should we… do something?” Azuma mumbled, rushing to his

feet.

“Not yet,” Tsukauchi whispered.

“How?” Yagi breathed on Mr Ito eyeballs and Sansa felt an itch develop on his own.

“He’s Quirkless! They told him to jump off a school roof! It. Never. Stopped. I complained to the school, they did nothing. I told the police and they laughed it off. So I took matters into my own hands and stopped it *permanently*.” Mr Ito was thrashing under Yagi’s death grip. Yagi whose expression had yet to change.

“So you killed them.” Yagi wasn’t asking a question.

“Yes!” Mr Ito’s voice reached a pitch that made Sansa cover his ears. “No one else was doing anything, so I did.”

“Did you ever tell their parents about the behaviour before you took it upon yourself to murder them? Before you robbed them of their chance to develop and grow?” Yagi’s voice was perfectly level, but Sansa felt his ears flatten. The voice wasn’t the problem…

“They-they wouldn’t have done anything,” Mr Ito stuttered, but it was too late. Far too late. “Rotten parents breed rotten children.”

“I don’t know about that, Mr Ito. I interviewed your son and he’s an all star student with a bright future ahead of him in baseball and in his business degree. Guess the apple fell far from the tree here, didn’t it?” Yagi idly reflected and Mr Ito gagged under Yagi's hands.

“Right, I think now’s a good time. I’m going in,” Tsukauchi called over his shoulder as he bolted for the interview room’s door. Sansa could only stare.

With Giran a snivelling wreck who cried when Yagi’s name was mentioned and Mr Ito starting to resemble Giran in the same way, Sansa didn’t think it’d be long at all before the man was unleashed on Shigaraki and the League of Villains officers. After the pile of convictions that flooded out the door due to Yagi, Sansa didn’t think there wasn’t a single cop in Japan who wouldn’t be looking forward to Shigaraki’s interrogation after what had happened at Kamino.

If there was anything any of them agreed on about Yagi, it was the mess he made of offenders who harmed children.

There was a two hundred year old criminal delicately drawing diagrams on the palm of Izuku's hand. A line here, an arc there. Delicate squiggles in other places. Each line a different Quirk, some strokes a different application. His brain starved of sight, Izuku could almost see All For One's description of his Kamino loadout. Another part of his brain was similarly amazed that his hand was, likely, still going to be attached after the experience. "Overall, I've found the brute force and recoil needed to match All Might blow for blow unnecessary. There are other Quirks with better synergy that require less strain and have more impactful results." Something more impactful than Quirks that already levelled a city… Izuku shuddered to think of it.

"But why use those instead of more efficient Quirks?" Izuku asked, twitching slightly as All For One drew a square on his hand. "You could have, I don't know… poisoned him? He's got strength, but no immunities. Most people don't." The moment it left his lips, Izuku clamped his jaws shut. *Stop giving him ideas*, his brain screamed at him.

"How pragmatic," All For One purred and Izuku cringed. "I had my reasons. Namely an *inspirational* piece that I saw while perusing national television. I wanted a more personal touch." All For One being inspired by television. That was… normal. "Your ability to maintain range on Todoroki with pressure blasts and without direct contact was an interesting style. I was curious to see how much force was required to correctly execute the end result." Okay, that was less normal. That made Izuku's stomach drop like a stone into a lake.

All For One had stolen Izuku's idea. All For One *had used it on All Might*. All For One might have even killed All Might if it wasn't for the… distraction that Izuku's death posed, for whatever that unknown reason happened to be. But why? Izuku's technique wasn't that new or different was it? All Might had long since used pressure blasts as part of his arsenal.

"What? Why me? I- I didn't even use it for the first two rounds." And ended up with precisely one recommendation to his name. Nobody was interested in how people handled situations without a Quirk. Kacchan and the Sludge Villain proved it and so did the heroes watching the Festival. The recommendation was a favour called in by All Might. All Might who he was never going to see again. Izuku swallowed heavily.

“Precisely,” All For One said so immediately that all of Izuku doubts about the Sports Festival came crashing back. “You made it through the first two rounds with no application of a Quirk, but by purely taking advantage of your surroundings. In the first you used the field itself and appropriated Bakugou’s technique to soar your way to victory with almost no strain. In the second you recruited others to fight on your behalf. Again without lifting a finger. Only in the third were you pushed to it and you didn’t have to do that either, did you?” Izuku could almost hear the predatory smirk. “You provoked Todoroki. I’m sure you had your reasons beyond a school game. I warned Tomura before your exhibition had even commenced that you were a threat to him.” *To him*, echoed through Izuku’s head. “You’re extremely rare, little Izuku.” All For One concluded by drawing a circle on Izuku’s hand.

“No I’m not,” Izuku immediately denied. It was common sense. Using One For All back then would have killed someone and severely injured Izuku. It wasn’t an option.

“Give yourself some credit. You’re the first person I’ve seen so much as attempt to use the school’s format against them,” All For One pushed. “You know what they say about imitation being the sincerest form of flattery. Your showing was very impressive.” *To the supervillain who’s meant to be your arch enemy and not your future colleagues*, Izuku’s brain filled in. It really wasn't helping.

“If you say so.”

“I insist.”

With that, All For One launched into another recollection of another encounter and Izuku had a thought… If All For One’s Quirk loadout was new to him on the basis of Izuku’s showing… how hadn’t he killed all of them as they cowered behind the wall when he blew away the rest of the surrounding areas? And why hadn’t All For One asked him about his Quirk yet? It had to be coming eventually. Questions for another day and he dragged himself back to the present conversation.

With the supervillain who killed him and wanted his opinion on Quirks. Not exactly how Izuku had expected this to go, especially the handholding.

Neito had screwed up. His classmates told him that, his parents agreed and that nutcase Bakugou had sealed the deal. He had to do

something to fix it. Sitting in the Ida family's dining room with Tenya Ida opposite, a tray of tea and biscuits before them, only made it even more obvious. Ida was the only one who was willing to speak to him. The other responses from 1-A were frosty to say the least and Neito… Neito didn't blame them. Not after the stupidity of what he'd said, half baked and with no idea of what happened to Midoriya. Midoriya who was, admittedly, one of the more tolerable members of 1-A. Midoriya who was dead.

"He's really… gone?" Neito repeated, trying to shake off the phantom sensation of his jaw and skull shattering from a single punch. Neito had only been punched, but the full force of a falling skyscraper was far more menacing. Neito knew that Midoriya wasn't walking away from that. Anyone with half a brain should have known that.

"Bakugou saw Midoriya's body being taken by the villain," Ida nodded stiffly. Neito could still see his opposite's shoulder's shake in spite of his level voice. "Midoriya's eyes were," Ida visibly swallowed, "open until the villain shut them. He died on impact."

Neito now had a fair idea of precisely why Bakugou had hit him. Bakugou had seen the worst of what happened and Neito felt his conscience tweak. He shouldn't have said anything, not when the police weren't being entirely honest it seemed.

"I… I offended your classmates by suggesting Midoriya had run away. I-I didn't think," Neito stammered out, acutely aware of Ida's darkening expression. "I'm sorry I said something so stupid without confirming what happened first."

"It's not your fault," Ida said simply and Neito almost dropped his teacup. "It's a surprise to you that the police did something so shameful, but it's not to me."

Neito blinked and set his teacup down. "What do you mean, Ida?" Ida's family had been in the pro hero business for a very long time. By sheer probability alone he had to have heard of the police doing less than legitimate things in their course of duty.

"What I tell you now doesn't leave this room, correct?" Ida glared and Neito hurriedly nodded.

"Not a word to anyone." Neito could do that. Hopefully.

"Endeavor wasn't the one who took down Stain. Another thing Midoriya won't ever receive credit for," Ida spat and Neito felt his

world slow down. “I’m tired of hiding from people who should know.” Midoriya… was the one who captured Stain? Was that why Ida, Todoroki and Midoriya had been injured on their internships? Why wasn’t it in the news reports?

“What, why didn’t the police tell the media? How did that even happen?” Neito found himself leaning in to Ida whose hands shook as he poured them more tea.

“I stumbled across Stain in my internship, he was about to kill Native. Midoriya was in the area and noticed that I wasn’t with my supervisor and he came to look for me and prevented Stain from killing Native and myself. He summoned in Todoroki for reinforcements and together we captured Stain.” Ida’s head was to the ceiling, but Neito spied a moist glisten. “The police told us that we could either accept responsibility and be punished or allow Endeavor to claim the credit for Stain’s capture.”

Neito felt his jaw drop. That was outrageous that-“that’s illegal!” Neito felt burst out. “It’s been well accepted for years that everyone is allowed to use their Quirks for self defence so long as it’s reasonable. None of you did anything wrong. Did they just expect you to stand there and be murdered by the maniac?” Neito watched Ida nod and savagely bite into another biscuit.

“He gave me the opportunity to run… but, I wasn’t going to sit there and let my brother’s attacker get away,” Ida confessed and Neito shrugged. Ida’s reasons for not running were irrelevant. Stain was still about to kill an innocent person.

“Does it matter? Native was still there. Were you just meant to let him to be murdered because being a pro hero was his job? That’s appalling!” Was Neito really going into a field where the police expected bystanders to just let him die if he was on the ropes? Clearly the three were in a position to help and the police wanted to punish them, not their useless officers. What else was there that the school and police weren’t telling them? “I can’t believe that was their excuse. It sounds more like they were embarrassed because they couldn’t catch a single lunatic when three students did. I would have told them to shove it and exposed them for what they are - incompetent!” Neito thumped the table and saw the ghost of a nod from the alarmed Ida.

“If only we’d known this before… before Midoriya…” Ida murmured quietly. “We could have done something.”

“I understand.” Neito did understand, feeling the flush of shame work its way up his spine. Midoriya hadn’t run away from anyone in his lifetime it seemed and 1-A was the same. They were caught up in constant disasters because they stayed to help. “I owe Bakugou an apology, along with the rest of your class. Do you happen to have their numbers?”

Bakugou and 1-A weren’t going to accept a standard apology from what Neito had just heard. He was going to need more...

"Say, Ida, what exactly is Bakugou up to at the moment?"

Ida spoke and Neito nodded. He had an idea.

It was up there as being one of the stupidest ideas Izuku had ever had in his entire life. At least it was only an idea so far and no errant mumbles had alerted All For One to its existence. He knew exactly where it had come from though…

Izuku still wasn’t sure exactly how much time had passed, but he was assuming that he was being fed three meals a day, with his dressings changed once a day as well. He wished it was just the dressings, but after being towelled off by All For One following a shower as though he were particularly disobedient, yowling pet cat. Izuku could indignantly and with horror add a daily shower to that list as well. Now, taking that into account, Izuku had counted over twenty meals which left him with the deeply unsatisfying conclusion that he’d been awake and in All For One’s care for around a week. A vague week in which he was inching closer to All For One’s promised radio. A radio which mentioned a Friday on the day it was turned on and left on his side table.

That was a solid week of struggling, fidgeting, flexing and frustration. Izuku’s arms might have the same approximate mobility as lead piping, but at least he could lift them now. Lift and slightly reposition himself, if it came down to it. He wasn’t going to give All For One more reasons to invade his personal space if he could help it, not when All For One didn't seem to need one at the best of times.

“Ah, you can hold them up for longer now,” All For One’s almost perkier voice registered. “Almost there. What about your legs?”

And there was the source of Izuku’s extremely stupid idea. He could roll his ankles and his toes rolled even more naturally than his fingers,

but his knees and calves stubbornly refused to move. They may as well have been locked in position. The sensations were there, but his brain almost seemed to have forgotten how to move them. Izuku was sorely tempted to trickle One For All down, but if he couldn't move his leg who was to say what the Quirk would do to it? His arms were already riddled with atrophy and Izuku shuddered to think at what the Quirk would do to the untoned muscle. All Might had told him what One For All did to an unprepared vessel and Izuku… Izuku was anything but prepared anymore. And, naturally, that was where the idea came in… His extremely stupid idea.

Asking All For One for anything was a risk, as Izuku had come to discover. Not because All For One wanted anything in return, but because he *didn't*. Izuku still had absolutely no idea where he stood with his murderer as the man towelled off Izuku's hair. There was nothing, apart from an absentminded comment and pat about how it kept its shape even while soaked. There were no threats, no signs that he was going after Kacchan or All Might… But Izuku was at least a week in and All For One was over a century old at the minimum and had seemingly faked his death for six years. A week might have felt like an eternity to Izuku, but it was all of five seconds to All For One…

All For One could wait, but the longer Izuku waited, the less likely the news would be to have follow up coverage of Kamino and the recovery efforts. Izuku didn't want to wait and at this point, what could All For One even do?

"That-that Quirk you used on Kurogiri while he was unconscious…" Izuku broached, feeling as though he was ascending an executioner's platform.

"Yes? What about it?" Eager. All too eager. Izuku would almost call it a hunger, the way All For One's vast focus would instantly shift to *him*. It was strange to have someone so focused, but being who it was made it that much worse. No topic was an obstacle, All For One latched on and held on as if he was starved for conversation… and that might well be the case. Izuku hadn't seen him speak to anyone else apart from Dr Tsubasa and even those exchanges were fleeting, impersonal and businesslike. Tsubasa didn't get the same complaints about Quirk mechanics from All For One that Izuku did. Nor the same compliments. The "good doctor", if anything, was almost flung to the side in All For One's haste to be rid of him.

"What exactly is it?" Izuku continued, wishing he could assume a bracing position. Or the foetal position.

“Forced Quirk Activation and it does precisely what the name implies,” All For One explained.

Already the cogs were turning in Izuku’s head… A Quirk that could activate other quirks. “What exactly about it is *Forced*?”

Izuku heard All For One’s knuckles crack and recoiled. “Sorry, that was unintentional.” Another thing that left Izuku on eggshells was the constant apologies. It was strange to hear it from anyone let alone a mass murderer. “It’s involuntary on the part of the receiver. I can activate or suppress any Quirk regardless of the consciousness or consent of my target. I admit, it was quite the find.” Izuku could believe that, most Quirks that interacted with other Quirks were rare by default. For once, though, Izuku wasn’t interested in its ability to trigger Quirks, but the mechanism behind it.

Now, the moment of truth. “Does it only work on Quirks… or the whole central nervous system? I think it would have to work on the whole central nervous system for you to even have control over the Quirk, unless you were adding something else to the mix?” Izuku had the explanation of the loadout, now he just needed the specifics confirmed.

Izuku heard him breathe in and out… “Are you suggesting what I think you’re suggesting, little Izuku?” Quick, too quick. Too eager.

Grimacing, Izuku raised his arm with some effort. “The arms are a work in progress, but I can’t get any movement above my ankles regardless of what I do. The nerves must work or I wouldn’t have any movement down there at all, meaning it’s a brain problem. So I was wondering…” *If you would trick my brain into seeing my legs again*, Izuku finished internally, once again recalling what a stupid idea it was to ask All For One of all people for anything. Izuku couldn’t trust him to do anything. Izuku *wouldn’t*, but with how he currently was, what exactly could be done to him? All For One had already killed him once. What was a second time?

“You *are* a clever boy, aren’t you?” Izuku didn’t know what the emotion in All For One’s voice was, but it unnerved him more than he would have liked. “You’re wondering if you can use it to correct your nervous system’s blind spot. If Forced Quirk Activation does work on the whole central nervous system, I can see the afflicted limbs even if your brain doesn’t and assist in it remaking the link. What an unconventional approach. If it performs as we expect it to, then we have a potential shortcut in your recovery.” There it was again, the

thing that disturbed Izuku the most, All For One's near smothering interest in Izuku's recovery, that seemed to eclipse all else. Not having the *why* was eating holes into Izuku and he was sure All For One had noticed it all too readily. Not that All For One seemed to be actively malicious in withholding his reason… not when Tsubasa didn't know either. All For One was hiding things from his own minions and that was almost worse.

"That's my thought…" That All For One had leapt on without any prompting or further explanation. All For One knew his Quirks, but… there was something dull in how he approached them. As though there was no interest in it which left Izuku feeling most lost than ever. All For One had said he'd been watching Search for years… but where was his motivation in using his other Quirks? There wasn't any, not until had Izuku had become involved and had ended up All For One's personal Quirk sounding board with almost nothing else to do with his time. Then Izuku could only guess how many hours went by, because All For One had an endless catalogue that he was only too happy to share. Not that it wasn't interesting, but Izuku really needed that radio.

"I see…" It was the gentlest caress and simultaneously more terrifying than any falling building. All For One's hand lingered on Izuku's exposed neck. Near the spine where it'd be so easy for the man to turn Izuku's broken body into a puppet. "It's not something I've experimented with previously. Give me time and I'll see what I can do for you while you make your attempts in the meanwhile."

All For One had finished speaking, but his hand lingered and Izuku once more reminded himself that All For One had killed him… and was planning for something even worse for Izuku to still be alive. Not that it seemed to deter All For One from their conversations and that only made Izuku even more suspicious.

Why kill someone, bring them back, discuss Quirks with them… and never ask about their Quirk.

Unless, Izuku thought with cold dread, *he already knows about my Quirk.*

Sensei was animated. More so than the doctor had seen in a long time, not since sometime before the Sports Festival and, prior to that, his injuries.

“Little Izuku raised an interesting possibility with Forced Quirk Activation.” Interesting didn’t begin to cover it. Why was a child with no Quirks of his own so obsessed with them? How did the boy know so much about them? A child with a Quirk that he “developed” well after the accepted time. It was all the doctor could do not to eye Sensei suspiciously.

Sensei was almost on a first name basis with their… guest. Well, it really was first name basis. The doctor had heard the man call the boy by his first name in the long months he’d been in the induced coma. Casually, with familiarity that preceded the death. Sensei knew the boy and the boy knew Sensei… He only knew of one person that could give Quirks, but why to this child who clearly thought that Sensei was hostile towards him? Was it a test of some sort? A mistake? If it was a mistake, why not take the Quirk back?

“I suppose Midoriya did. I can’t fault his logic. If it can activate Quirks without limitation, then presumably it can the rest of the body,” the doctor offered neutrally. “Of course, unless it has its own inbuilt limitations.” There was also the risk of tripping off the boy’s own Quirk which was destructive to say the least, and while Sensei would swan away from it, the boy would not. Not in his current shape. He’d told Sensei that before. Sensei would er on the side of caution with his guest and that was new as well.

“I suppose then we’ll have to experiment to see its viability for his suggestion,” Sensei stated and the doctor knew he was in for the long haul. Some hapless fool could always be obtained to run these tests and they wouldn’t be missed. But it raised other questions…

Prisoners didn’t have their ideas taken as recommendations. Prisoners didn’t have long and fruitful discussions with Sensei about his Quirk and its applications. Prisoners were not personally cared for by Sensei in any capacity. Even Shigaraki didn’t have the level of contact with Sensei in years that Midoriya had in scant months.

Which brought about the most important question - who exactly was Izuku Midoriya? And why did Sensei know about him before even the doctor did?

Chapter End Notes

Merry Christmas and happy holidays.

Interrogation

Chapter Summary

Questions without answers.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku Midoriya wasn't normal. There was no conceivable way that the boy was some average bystander who Sensei had conveniently saved. It was too convenient. What were the odds of Sensei saving someone with a scary intuition for Quirk usage? Staring down at the results before him, the doctor could only wonder.

"Little Izuku was right," Sensei murmured and the doctor saw his lips peel back into a smile. It was… something. He wasn't quite sure how to describe Sensei's lingering expression. It wasn't one he gave Shigaraki. Not in all the years the doctor had known them. The doctor had his doubts about Shigaraki and those were now long since fulfilled with his detainment by the police. Midoriya, on the other hand, was doing nothing but defy expectations. Expectations that shouldn't have been defied.

"*How* was he right?" The doctor murmured, watching the test subject twitch at the end of Sensei's long black tendrils. Arms, legs, hands, feet, all moved in coordination. A Quirk meant for activating Quirks, now repurposed without a single bit of outside engineering. With enough practice, Sensei could no doubt control multiple puppets from the impromptu threads… but *how* had Midoriya stumbled across this idea? It wasn't anything resembling the boy's own Quirk…

Usually people struggled with using their own Quirks creatively, but this test was only one of many spurred on by Sensei's discussions with what should have been an otherwise average child. Izuku Midoriya was anything but average as the doctor had come to discover. So much data, so little time to review it, all because of one child.

Sensei clustered his Quirks into categories, but the boy wanted *specifics*. Every nuance, every function, every setback of every Quirk. No Quirk was the same to Izuku Midoriya. By virtue of genetics, the boy was entirely right to hold such a view. Even a more generic enhancement Quirk was something he could dissect and make into

something more with its unique functions. In Midoriya's world, there was no such thing as a weak Quirk. Not when Sensei had the Quirk he did. The doctor suspected that is was less the boy's ideas that prompted these experiments, but rather his criticism of Sensei's existing Quirk usage.

"Izuku has a certain *gift* with Quirks." Then Sensei began to tremble. "Can you believe he criticised me for not poisoning All Might to bypass his resistance to blunt force?" Sensei *chuckled*. "I was too *inefficient* for his standards." Inefficiency and Sensei weren't concepts he'd often contemplated in the same sentence. Having seen the results of Midoriya's speculations, he was prepared to think otherwise. If Sensei had flaws, the boy was working his way through them, bit by bit. An unsettling thought. "He has limitless ideas on applications and tests for the full capacity of Quirks. Years of experience." But *how*? *How* did Midoriya have so much experience? Being Quirkless, he was the last person who should know anything about Quirks.

If it wasn't for the ongoing tests that Sensei had been conducting, it would have taken the doctor for more than a little surprise."Including yours, it seems, Sensei." Who in their right mind would lecture *Sensei* on using Quirks correctly? Izuku Midoriya, apparently, who didn't care about Sensei's status or not care enough for it to stop him. Even the doctor struggled to adapt to the… unique Quirk that belonged to Sensei. Limitless possibilities, but also limitless potential for combinations to go wrong, for unintended mutations to occur. How could Izuku Midoriya have any knowledge of it? How could a child, thought Quirkless for years, have knowledge Sensei found valuable?

"Especially mine." The tendrils tugged and the puppet stood and rose to its feet. "He's raised many valuable points about my Quirk," Sensei said softly and the doctor strained to hear his next words. "I've been lax in years gone by…"

"I find it strange when he was thought Quirkless for so long," the doctor thought aloud. "One would think his Quirk would be easily triggered by environmental conditions." It seemed to be an exceptionally powerful strength Quirk… and not one Sensei had taken either. Easily triggered…supposedly, but not in Midoriya's case.

Another interesting point was Sensei's seeming lacking of interest in the Quirk itself. Their spy had reported back to say the Quirk was called "Superpower", as if that wasn't an infuriatingly standard name. There were at least another seven Quirks the doctor knew of with the same name and same applications and it hadn't stopped Sensei's

critical observations and reallocations before. There was a distinct difference in how this was being handled.

While the doctor's mind whirled, the test subject took a step forwards, slow and deliberate, Sensei no doubt tugging at delicate nerves not usually within the Quirk's purview. But still, the Quirk held, even with a user who hadn't been born with it. It was a shame that Midoriya had chosen a different career path…

"Once upon a time, doctor, I would have agreed with you. Now though, I'm not so sure that Izuku was ever in a position to trigger those conditions." Something dark hovered in Sensei's tone, his mouth downturned and the doctor closed his own mouth in favour of adding to his notes. Another question floated around the doctor's skull. Why didn't Sensei treat "Superpower" like a generic enhancement Quirk? More than anything "Superpower" was bypassed for Midoriya's other areas of expertise that seemed to relate little to the Quirk.

"I find it difficult to see how he could have avoided it for so long," the doctor mumbled from the side of his mouth.

"You'd be surprised," Sensei said, lips quirked upwards. "Now… I believe this Quirk needs a new name…"

The doctor added it to Sensei's ever growing list. Midoriya would most likely be given the honour of naming it, along with the seventeen other Quirks he'd redefined.

Midoriya who'd been told to give up. Midoriya who died because he refused to give up. Midoriya who was here. There were no answers, not without asking the boy himself.

Those bastards had bagged him, like some scene out of kidnapping movie. Tomura could only see black, black and more black as he was moved. Least it wasn't white, but moved where? They hadn't said anything before they hooded him. They'd just shoved it on and he was being wheeled away.

"Where the he-" Tomura started and took a blow to the head.

"Shut up. You aren't here to speak. If I had my way I'd have left you rotting back in your cell, but management has other plans," a gruff voice grunted. "So be a good boy and keep your mouth shut, so I don't have to listen to your fucking voice, right?"

Shit. It was the crazy one. Toga would've liked this one. If they were all in here with him, maybe they'd already met the bastard…

"Wher-?" Another blow to the head. Tomura reeled, seeing stars through the blackness of the hood.

"Stop. Fucking. Talking." An animal. This fucking guy was an animal. An insect. He'd crush this pathetic guard as soon as Sensei came and removed the restraints. "Scum like you don't get to ask questions."

This time, Tomura kept his mouth shut. He was being transferred. This guard wasn't happy about it… So where were they going? Did it have something to do with Tsukauchi?

Bumps. An elevator that Tomura could hear, a ramp, chains close by and finally… an engine roaring to life… footsteps beside him. For a moment, hope sparked. Had Sensei arranged something? Was this part of an escape? Was he finally going to be free?

"Morning, Shigaraki!" A cheerful and painfully familiar voice called and Tomura's hopes sunk through the floor.

"Tsukauchi," Tomura hissed. "Where. Am. I?" He was going to turn all of them into dust the moment his hands were free. That guard would be first.

"A prison transport, Shigaraki. You should be familiar with them already." That voice pissed him off.

"Why?" Tomura snarled, violently shaking his head to remove the hood.

"We're going to have a friendly chat down at the station. It's much more comfortable than constantly coming here for interviews," Tsukauchi continued in an infuriatingly bright voice. "My partner will be formally introduced to you as well." Yeah, Tsukauchi had mentioned that before, hadn't he? Some noob was going to be talking to him. Great.

Tomura laughed harshly, the sound bursting from him. "You idiots. Sensei will know, Sensei will come. What will you do then?" Tomura drawled.

"Eh, if you say so," Tsukauchi said so indifferently that Tomura would have stared at him if he could. "General consensus is that your Sensei is taking a holiday after what All Might did to him," Tsukauchi

blithely carried on. *No, it can't be.* "If he's around, we haven't seen hide nor hair of him. Maybe he's fled the country, we don't know."

"You're lying," Tomura snapped. "As if that weakling All Might could do anything." Tomura felt part of brain betray him, the memories of Sensei's bloodied form six years ago, the desperation to save him. The despair… Sensei had never been the same afterwards. No one ever was after injuries like that.

"Keep telling yourself that, if it makes you feel better. On the bright side, if you're right, we're not going to have a terrible lot of warning," Tsukauchi added, his tone of voice unchanging. "It'll be out of nowhere."

"Why," Tomura said slowly, "do you sound so pleased?" This had to be some sort of trick, to lull him into saying something about Sensei. It had to be.

"The change of scenery. I've never really liked white. Reminds me of funerals." Tomura could almost hear the shrug.

"Good for you, Tsukauchi, but I can't see anything," he hissed venomously. "Maybe if this hood came off I could see what you're talking about."

"I really wish I could help you there, Shigaraki, but one of the conditions for taking you out is following the advice of the warden," Tsukauchi explained.

"And the warden thinks that me being blinded is going to make a difference?" Tomura spat.

"We don't make these decisions, we just follow them. We're just as stuck with them as you are that hood." Tomura wasn't going to make the mistake of thinking that Tsukauchi was sympathetic. He was the enemy, they all were, he couldn't trust any of it. Their filthy lies about Sensei.

Instead of responding, Tomura ground his teeth. Bridge joints, sirens, screeching, a horn… sirens that made Tomura perk up for a split second before they passed him by and he deflated. Tsukauchi's incessant, droning, humming and the flick of pages that might or might not be a newspaper. For what felt like hours, he listened to every idiotic sound until the truck coasted to a stop.

"Oh good, we're here. Getting permission was surprisingly difficult, all

things considered." Tomura heard a newspaper flap shut and a sharp metallic pop as Tsukauchi got to his feet. "I mean… you're not that high up the pecking order."

"What the *hell* is that meant to mean?"

"Well, you don't seem to know your Sensei's real name, so we figured…" Tsukauchi trailed off.

"What the fuck does that mean?" Shigaraki lunged, thrashing in his restraints, even as he was wheeled down the ramp.

"It means exactly what I said it means. My bosses said that, not me," Tsukauchi added.

Tomura was going to kill fucking all of them. How *dare* they.

"In we go!"

Tomura felt the material of the floor change again. On and on until he bumped over another joint and came to a rest.

"*Now* the hood can come off," Tsukauchi sighed and with a wrench from him, Tomura could see again.

"The hell…" It was an interview room. A perfectly normal interview room, mirrors and all. Apart from… "Why the hell are there guards here?" Tomura sneered. "Are you that frightened of me?" Losers.

Tsukauchi smiled grimly. "Actually, those weren't requested by the warden, he's fairly confident about your restraints holding. My bosses required those for… other reasons." Tsukauchi grimaced and Tomura found himself staring blankly. Why would they have two armed guards if they weren't him?

"You people are weirdos."

"Yeah, we get that a lot," Tsukauchi sighed, dropping a stack of folders onto the steel table in front of him with a solid thud. "Now, before we proceed, I need to introduce my colleague." Tsukauchi knocked on the table three times and the door behind Tomura swung open. Footsteps.

He. Couldn't. Breathe. There was *something*, in the air. A Quirk? What… what the hell was it? It was crushing his lungs. Air! He needed air.

“Good morning, Tomura Shigaraki,” a cool voice greeted him. “I’m Detective Yagi, Detective Tsukauchi’s partner or *buddy*.” Sharp contempt clung to the word “buddy”, as if it did something personal to offend him. Then he stepped into view. A seven foot tall emaciated corpse was staring down at him, darkened eyes narrowed, an angular face set with a straight mouth.

“Wha-wh-,” Tomura gasped for air. The air… was solid… where had it gone?

“Problem, Shigaraki? It’s polite to formally introduce yourself back, or did your Sensei struggle with basic socialisation? Nevermind, I think we already know the answer to that one,” Yagi might have said under his breath… if it wasn’t for his complete lack of attempt to hide the indifference dripping from his voice or to lower the volume.

“I-I-can’t…. breathe,” he wheezed to both of them.

“That’s unfortunate, but neither are people who died at Kamino,” Yagi said shortly, dropping into the camping chair next to Tomura. “Now, shall we begin?” The guards behind Yagi advanced to stand on either side of him.

There might have been a wince from Tsukauchi, and a slight, helpless shrug. Tomura was on his own, unable to breathe with… whatever the fuck this *thing* was.

“Deep breaths help, Shigaraki, deep breaths,” the skeleton intoned. “It wouldn’t do for our record if you dropped dead on the floor without a reason.” *Without a reason* seemed to carry an additional layer of menace that hitched Tomura’s breathing back into life.

“Stop using your Quirk on me. You pigs aren’t allowed to do that,” Tomura hissed. “You can’t do anything.”

The skeleton sighed theatrically. “I regret to inform you, Shigaraki, that your weak constitution is not a result of my Quirk.” Yagi grinned, teeth bared. The rest of his face hadn’t moved. “My Quirk is more… distinct. More *finely tuned* for people such as yourself, shall we say.” What… what did that mean? What the hell was this guy saying? Was he some sort of torturer?

Tomura swallowed heavily. “What the fuck is your problem?” Tsukauchi… Tsukauchi was nothing like this, none of the fucking guards had shit on this guy.

“I don’t have a problem, Shigaraki. It’s just *work*. We’re here to help after all.” All of the blood drained from Tomura’s face, he could feel it. Work? Who the hell called this “just work”?

“Yeah, Shigaraki, we don’t want to be pushy, but we do have a job to do,” Tsukauchi’s mild voice was almost swallowed by the density of the air. “It’s nothing personal.”

It didn’t feel impersonal. It felt like the skeleton hovering inches from his face was going to take a bite out of it at any given moment. It felt like he was waiting for a reason to do it, the weight on Tomura’s lungs never lifting.

“We need some help understanding what you’ve been doing,” Tsukauchi said lightly. “Can you help me understand what exactly prompted your appearance at the Unforseen Simulation Joint at UA, or the “USJ” as it’s often abbreviated to?” Tsuakauchi’s face was almost welcoming, then Tomura made the mistake of looking to his right and was greeted with Yagi a mere two centimetres from his face and almost yelped. “We definitely know that you were there, can you tell us why?”

“Ha! Don’t you already know why?” He snarled. “Are you really that stup-?” And his voice abruptly cut out as though he’d been noosed.

“There’s no need to be *rude*, Shigaraki. As I said, we’re here to *help*.” Yagi’s icy blue eyes gleamed in the shadows of his face.

It didn’t feel like help. It felt like phantom hands were wrapped around his throat. He couldn’t breathe. Was this what Sensei felt like?

“If you use your manners, Shigaraki, we’ll be on our best behaviour… Won’t we, Detective Tsukauchi?” A neutral voice… that Tomura didn’t trust for a second. Not when the air itself was trying to smother him.

“Of course,” Tsukauchi nodded. Tomura spotted a folded up newspaper next to him, a cheerful baseball team on the almost invisible edge.

Swallowing thickly, Tomura couldn’t shake the ghostly hands placed around his throat.

“Now,” Yagi repeated, “what prompted your appearance at the USJ? What was your reason for being there?” His voice might have been calm, but the crushing hands… weren’t fading. Yagi smiled from between the guards and Tomura trembled.

This… this wasn't like dealing with All Might. This Yagi was a freak, a freak looking for a reason.

Sensei, help!

"Bakugou… where are we?" Neito frowned at the blond, next time he ask before they left. There was a decrepit apartment building looming over them and a small huddle of drenched people off to the side beneath a balcony's overhang. Cameras and microphones hanging from them gave Neito a far idea of who they were if not why there were here specifically. Nor why they were soaking wet.

"Deku's mother lives here," Bakugou grunted. Well, that explained why the media were here.

"And… we're here to… do what exactly?" Neito asked cautiously. Ida's explanation only made him even more wary of Bakugou. The other teenager was never stable to begin with, but Midoriya's death had only pushed him further over the edge. He'd almost attacked a bystander who mentioned Midoriya's name on the way over. Neito had dragged him away with prejudice, narrowly avoiding burns and his eardrums being ruptured.

"We're checking up on her, you idiot. The fucking police never told her what happened to Deku," Bakugou grimaced, spittle flying as he spoke and Neito winced.

"She doesn't know," Neito repeated with dawning realisation. *Oh!* So Midoriya's mother wasn't part of the coverup. That was exceptionally cruel to mislead the woman into thinking there was a chance that her son was going to be coming back. What were the police thinking? People sued for less.

"Fucking no and no other bastard, including the police, have been to see her yet since they gave her the news that he was *missing*," Bakugou growled. "Deku didn't have much in the way of family or family friends. His dad was some absentee Father of the Year asshole and I never heard about or saw any other relatives when we were younger. She doesn't have anyone and she was never close to my hag. No fucking surprises there as to why." If Bakugou's parents were anything like Bakugou, Neito didn't blame Midoriya's mother for not wanting to be involved. "I'm not expecting his prick of a father to be at the funeral either." Harsh, but it explained a lot.

“Are we going to… tell her what happened?” Neito cautiously broached. That wasn’t going to end well for anyone.

“Not yet. Know a guy who’s working on getting the formal shit sorted so no one thinks she’s crazy for organising the funeral,” Bakugou grunted. “Can’t even do that yet, fucking police. Got all the shit ready to go and everyone will think she’s a nut for trying to bury him now. Shit investigations.”

What was there to say about that? Of course, after what Ida said about Stain, it wasn’t a surprise that they’d shift the blame elsewhere, hoping that no one would notice their mistakes. They were going to charge children for saving Native’s life and the life of a fellow student and countless other would be victims of Stain. The police caring about a single Heroics student, a dime a dozen category, would have been unusual. Instead they lied to protect UA’s reputation and their own. Couldn’t mar Bakugou’s triumphant rescue with the death of one of the rescuers after all. Perhaps that was the reason for Bakugou’s rage…

Once the boss of the villains had appeared, where was the cordon to prevent his destruction from reaching people like Midoriya? What was Endeavor doing instead of evacuating people from the area? The other villains had already been dealt with by the time Endeavor had arrived and the casualty toll had to have been made worse by the lack of action by so many heroes. Half the school had seen Todoroki’s confrontation with his father. He wasn’t the only one asking that question. Not when other people started hearing about missing and presumed dead family members. Midoriya was “missing” when everyone else had the benefit of closure.

Todoroki definitely wasn’t high on the list of forgiving any of the people involved. Not with the choice words he said to father. Todoroki had refused to go home or go anywhere near the man at all, which explained what Endeavor was doing on campus. Bakugou didn't seem to have any idea where Todoroki was living either. “I don’t blame him. His dad’s a bottomless bag of dicks, but fucked if I know where he went,” Bakugou had… fumed. Well, it was only natural Todoroki’s classmates would more of an insight on that particular dynamic.

“We’re here,” Bakugou grunted and he knocked firmly on the door. Footsteps approached and the door opened.

Neito did a double take. “What the fuck are you doing here, Icy?” Todoroki blinked back at them with only a mild expression of

surprise. One that seemed stuck on Neito more than Bakugou.

“Avoiding the old man. You?”

“Checking up on Deku’s mother, since everyone’s been a fucking asshole. I don’t think those useless fucks have so much as sent cards in.” That must be the parents, because after the… incident, 1-A and 1-B students had sent in cards.

“I offered to come along… just because,” Neito added and felt Todoroki stare. Todoroki was perhaps questioning Neito’s living status while in the presence of Bakugou.

“No one else was available. Glasses sent him to apologise.” An understatement of the screaming match that had occurred, but Bakugou wasn’t exactly in a position to be refusing help.

“Right… Well, I guess you guys can come in. Had to scare off some paparazzi earlier. They wanted an interview,” Todoroki opened the door further to let them in.

Neito stepped in after Bakugou and swallowed. “Todoroki… I take it that Mrs Midoriya isn’t taking it well?” The apartment was an unmitigated disaster. Furniture awry, unpacked groceries, clothing left lying about. Neito cringed just looking at it.

“No. I don’t think so.” Toneless as ever, Todoroki pointed towards a clean corner where he’d started to neatly arrange things. “She’s asleep at the moment. Do you want to help?”

Bakugou cracked his knuckles. “Yeah, don’t wake her up. I don't think she’d have been sleeping well with the fucking media camped at her house. I sure as fuck wasn’t.” Neito had forgotten about that, but it was entirely likely that Bakugou was dealing with the same scum outside of his house that Mrs Midoriya was.

“I’ll start over here,” Neito offered, pointing towards a particularly egregiously high pile of clothing that seemed to have been dropped and not picked up. Meanwhile, Bakugou had wandered off to grab something else from a cupboard.

“Hmm, wondering if I should cook lunch for her,” Todoroki inclined his head. “She’ll wake up soon.”

“Can you even cook?” Bakugou growled, aggressively sweeping something into a dustpan. “The last thing she needs is some idiot

burning her apartment down." *In addition to her son dying*, Neito silently added.

"The basics," Todoroki nodded. Todoroki turned his head towards Neito. "What about you?"

"I… can go shopping. I somehow don't think she would have stocked the house if this is the current state of it." Neito waved a hand at the general disarray. He strongly doubted that anything had been stocked. Was she even feeding herself?

Todoroki stuck out a hand and Neito blinked at him. "You can copy Quirks right? When you go, can you replace the ice blocks above that mob of journalists outside? Just ease it in under the bottom of the balcony."

Neito smirked, thinking back to the soaked huddle downstairs. "Of course, Todoroki." He could do that.

"Right side for ice, left for fire," Todoroki explained after Neito leaned forwards to tap his hand. "Avoid the left, because you'll set your clothing on fire." Neito nodded in response, taken aback at the non-existent hesitation. "I've already got a list; I was going to ask Mrs Midoriya if she could pay for it, but then we'd have to wake her up. How are we paying for this?"

"I'll cover it," Bakugou grunted. "Everyone put in some money towards it from class. Ponytail put in a small fortune for anything Deku's mother needs and Kirishima took the money I gave him for the night vision and put it straight back into the pool. Plenty for groceries."

How organised. Maybe Bakugou was less of a savage than Neito had first thought if 1-A trusted him with the fund for caring for Mrs Midoriya. Maybe his instability was selective.

"Alright, pass it over."

Neito left with a bundle of yen, a list, a large block of ice which he carefully installed to the underside of balcony and a spring in his step.

He ignored the subsequent crash and shrieks of the people behind him. The blunt icicles tapered with a weak upper connection to the main block were a personal touch.

Izuku couldn't shrug off his nervous twitch. His arms moved nearly normally, but came with crushing fatigue and a sense of weight. He'd almost fallen from the bed in his attempts to reach the beside table, only for All For One to casually lift and tuck him back in. The price of having the rails down, it seemed.

"If you need help finding it, I can show you where it is," All For One offered. An extremely kindly offer coming from the man in question. Why was he being so helpful? Izuku felt his face twist and made an attempt to shove down the emotion that was bordering somewhere between confusion and terror.

"I don't get you," Izuku instead sighed.

"I'm sorry if I didn't live up to your expectations of torture and general misery," All For One responded with the lightest touch of sarcasm. "Though recoveries like yours are their own form of torture, and not a discriminating one either." There was an almost disgruntlement in how that was worded that set off Izuku's twitch again.

"But why? Why wait for a recovery at all?" Izuku prodded.

"Why not?" All For One smoothly answered. Evasive as ever.

"You didn't help anyone else you buried," Izuku pointed out. Izuku had no idea if that was really true or not, but he could take an educated guess. If Shigaraki was in a cell somewhere, he doubted All For One had so much as stopped to glance at anyone else.

"I didn't feel like it." That was typical.

Izuku took a deep breath. "You know, for how much time you've spent telling me about your Quirks… you've never once asked me about mine."

Silence. Only the sound of All For One's soft breaths. "I already have an idea of your Quirk, little Izuku."

"Just an idea?" Izuku pushed. One For All couldn't be taken. If All For One had made any attempt to take it, it would have failed and Izuku would be immediately exposed. All For One who… admired Izuku's technique. Not attempting to take the source would surely be out of character for someone who dived on Ragdoll's at the first opportunity… Or was it the first opportunity? All Might was injured about six years ago. All For One had all of the time before that to do

something about it, but why hadn't he? He didn't need to fake his death until after All Might had injured him.

"You're usually restless. What's wrong?" All For One's voice might have been concerned, but Izuku wasn't going to trust anything. Especially not the hand that was resting on his own after the comment.

"Don't change the topic," Izuku exhaled shakily. Better to get it done with sooner rather than later. "You have an idea, but you never tried to clarify…"

All For One *sighed*. "Because I already have a suspicion as to the answer, little Izuku, and it's not one that I wanted confirmed. Even though your stay here has just about guaranteed its confirmation. As did All Might's disappearance from the public eye," All For One added as an almost afterthought.

It didn't stop Izuku's breath from catching in his throat and not his lungs. *All Might's missing? What happened?* But that was something he could hopefully discover with the radio. "Why not?"

"My brother's Quirk was never meant shatter a fragile child's bone with a finger flick," All For One bluntly stated and Izuku winced feeling his rapid breaths reach a crescendo. *He knew. How long has he known?* "When I gave it to him, it was a crutch. Something to help him cope with his illness." Izuku doubted that. The Noumu proved that All For One was willing to give people Quirks for other reasons. "Imagine my surprise when Tomura told me about a child with All Might's speed who interfered with his operations."

Izuku's fingers locked on one hand, the other was pinned by All For One's own clawed fingers. "But… why would that surprise you?" Izuku could hear the rattle in his own voice. One For All was in its ninth incarnation. Tenth if he counted All For One himself. It being passed on shouldn't have come as a shock.

"It being passed on was no great surprise, but All Might's choice of victim most certainly was," All For One said so bitterly that Izuku was thrown for a loop.

"Victim? I'm not-," Izuku attempted to interject but was cut off with a gentle squeeze of his hand. Why would Izuku as the candidate even surprise him? Izuku was a Quirkless nobody. Was that why he was surprised?

“Izuku, you will never have natural use of your hands again because of that Quirk,” All For One deployed with the tact of a large nuclear bomb. The use of Izuku’s first name was every bit as creepy as Izuku’s first realisation of it being used. “You will go for the rest of your life with chronic pain, *because* All Might knowingly gave you a Quirk that’s not suited to you in any capacity. How many bones have you shattered? Did he even teach you how to use it properly before its consequences were thrust upon you? Did he tell you about its history? Did he tell you about *me*?” All For One pushed and Izuku leaned away from him only to be lightly tugged back. “These are question that *he* should be answering, not you. You’re not responsible for his inability to make an informed decision,” All For One edged out. It was *wrong* to hear it worded like that.

“But I can answer them,” Izuku started, feeling All For One’s grip tighten, then closed his mouth. Easily, if All For One wanted answers. The reasoning should have been obvious. Except All For One wasn’t accepting that for an answer.

“That doesn’t mean that *you* should be answering them,” All For One almost hissed. “This never should have been your problem.” *One For All… a problem?* Izuku was thankful that his blindfold hid his bemused blink. One For All was going to be passed on whether All For One liked it or not. It wasn’t Izuku’s problem.

“Problem?” Izuku repeated, against his better thoughts, feeling a swell of irritation. “I don’t think having it made much difference when you killed me.”

And All For One froze in his tracks. “I suppose not… but it doesn’t excuse All Might’s behaviour.” What behaviour? What was it that All For One was so offended by? All For One wasn’t even trying to defend himself this time, either. For someone who snipped at All Might’s every breath of air, it was unsettling for All For One not to pounce on the opportunity.

“I don’t think you’d ever excuse him anyway,” Izuku sighed. “What did he even do to you?” And that was a question Izuku wanted answered more than even knowing why he’d been saved. He could have a rough guess as to why he’d been “saved”, but All For One’s overflowing contempt went beyond other villains. It was infinitely more personal, in every biting word, every cutting remark. All Might had done… something to All For One. Something more than just receiving a Quirk. Something that struck at All For One on a personal level.

“What didn’t he do? He took *almost* everything from me.” Izuku lingered on the *almost*. It wasn’t a happily voiced word. All For One’s twitching hand made that even clearer.

Izuku shook his head. “You’re over a hundred years old, aren’t you? Don’t you have time to just… rebuild?” The League of Villains had been alive and well until All For One had abandoned them and All Might might have lost their rematch if All For One hadn’t withdrawn when he did. What did All For One even have to lose? His brother was long dead. One For All was spoken with the same intonation as a particularly profane curse word. Izuku was desperately needing *whys* in all aspects of the old man beside him.

“When you reach my age, you will quickly discover that not everything can be saved or rebuilt,” All For One uttered so menacingly that Izuku leant away. “It’s never the same again, not that All Might ever had any respect for that. Someone in his position never would.”

Izuku inhaled slowly. The only permanent thing that came to mind was… death. Had-had All Might killed someone that All For One was close to? If he had, there was nothing in the media about it. All Might would never be able to hide something like that and Izuku couldn’t see him doing it. All Might would never.

He could ask All For One, but was it even safe? So far All For One’s ire hadn’t obviously been directed at Izuku, but that could always change. Izuku already had an association with All Might and One For All… Instead, Izuku kept his mouth shut while the man beside him fumed.

“I’ll never get it back,” All For One lamented. *Get what back?* Was the unasked question.

“But…” Izuku struggled to word his question.

“Why are you here when I’d happily drop All Might’s corpse into a shallow ditch?” All For One asked wryly. “You aren’t All Might,” All For One stated. “You never will be All Might.” Izuku trembled. All For One seemed relieved by his own statement.

“That doesn’t mean anything to me,” Izuku confessed. He wasn’t trying to be All Might. Not anymore.

“You’ll understand when you’re older.” Izuku would have groaned in exasperation if it wasn’t for the closeness of the fiend to him. Best not to risk it.

“How did you even find me?” Izuku instead asked. All For One wasn’t anywhere near the building that had fallen. Then again, he seemed to be able to track All Might, probably… with… Search… Izuku could feel the bile inching up his throat. Search needed sight… Was it enough just to see an image of someone or did they have to see the person directly? Ragdoll wasn’t very specific on that part of her Quirk. If it was the latter… *when* had All For One seen Izuku in person? When they escaped Kamino? All For One definitely would’ve seen him then.

All For One’s silence dragged on, before - “I think you already know the answer to that, don’t you Izuku? You’re an intelligent child.”

“Search,” Izuku said dumbly.

“I felt every single one of your broken bones mend after Muscular’s actions,” All For One said softly and it was then Izuku realised that All For One was much much closer than he had any right to be. An arm wrapped around Izuku’s shoulders and he froze. All For One had seen Izuku before Kamino… The Sports Festival maybe? “I don’t know how you destroyed finger after finger against Todoroki. Why didn’t the pain stop you? Pain is there for that reason.” By this point, Izuku was completely encircled. He couldn’t breathe. “But you ignored it repeatedly.” Too close. Far too close.

“It’s fine,” Izuku automatically said, but it was the wrong answer. The grip tightened.

“It. Is. Not. Fine.” If indignation were a tangible force, Izuku would have been crushed. “It is not acceptable for you to maim yourself for a school sporting event.”

“It-it wasn’t that bad,” Izuku shook his head violently. He could still use his hands after the fact… And who was All For One to be lecturing him on injuries? That was… over the top, coming from the guy who killed him and unceremoniously dragged him back from the dead.

“No one else felt the need to throw themselves on landmines,” was the tart reply.

“Most people don’t feel the need to mass murder civilians either,” Izuku shot back, feeling All For One reel him in. *I’m going to die*, Izuku thought with a surreal sense of relief. It hadn’t taken as long as he thought it would.

“They aren’t me.” Not an encouraging response and it was then Izuku

felt the fingers resting on his neck.

"… Who did you test it on?" Izuku inhaled shakily. *Oh god, he actually did it.* One of the Noumu? How many people had All For One already kidnapped or maimed? Who had suffered for this to be used on Izuku.

"No one you or greater society would care about," All For One shrugged. "Forced Quirk Activation is going to need a new name…" He paused for a moment. "Also, this is going to sting."

Izuku barely had time to brace himself before he felt every single nerve seize and a sharp pain at the back of his neck. There was a flex, as if mapping what as available and then the feeling shifted down from his neck to the rest of him.

"You were entirely right, you know. Quirks are the simplest thing for this particular Quirk to interface with, but that doesn't rule out other avenues of application. It's merely more difficult," All For One explained and Izuku felt his hand move without his consent. "For instance, I have to target away from the Quirk, against this one's better instincts. It's surprisingly difficult."

"This is a distraction," Izuku spoke through gritted teeth around the Quirk. All For One didn't want to answer the questions, but at least Forced Quirk Activation's new use didn't remove all control then… He could still speak.

Then, Izuku's leg twitched and the rest of him moved to push himself into a sitting position against All For One's grip and Izuku's mind went blank.

It worked. All For One had really tested it.

"Is it working?" Entirely too smug for his own good.

Feeling the tentacles retract, Izuku didn't dignify it with a response, reaching a blind arm towards the bedside table.

Chapter End Notes

Merry Christmas and happy holidays!

Awake

Chapter Summary

If your eyes are open, are you awake?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The date repeated itself endlessly in Izuku's head. *It can't be.* The host's voice cheerfully called the date and time with no regard to Izuku's situation. Izuku didn't recognise the voice, they weren't a hero that Izuku knew or heard of prior to being here. An intern maybe? Someone who would never understand, would never have the knowledge of what he'd just done. Still, the announcer went on, now a hum.

"Six months? I've been here for *six months*?" Izuku croaked to All For One. All For One who had yet to let go. If anything, his grip was even firmer than before.

Six months of school gone. His grades would never recover even if he did escape. He'd be held back a year and shoved into a class filled with unfamiliar faces. Faces that hadn't experienced what he had with 1-A. Faces that wouldn't be Ida, Uraraka, Kirishima, Tsu or Mineta or Kaminari or Kacchan or anyone else. Would they still even speak to him if he came back? Izuku didn't know, he couldn't know. What were they thinking? What would they think?

Six months of everyone assuming he was dead. His mother, burying… burying something, not him. There was nothing to bury. Would there be a service? Would anyone even be there? His mum and All Might would have to be there, but would 1-A attend? 1-A who hadn't come to help Kacchan… Would Kacchan be there? It seemed more likely than Izuku's father making an appearance. His father who never called, never seemed to care. His father who didn't exist beyond a salary.

Six months where All For One could have made another attempt at All Might. Six months where All For One couldn't have spent the whole time bedside. Scheming, planning, awaiting the right moment to make his next move. The next opportunity to strike.

Or… that would have been Izuku's assumption, but All For One wasn't

brimming with confidence and swagger. Quiet, sometimes amused, reserved, overly helpful and, at times, snide, but never really at Izuku… All For One was nothing like his display at Kamino. Unreadable for Izuku and he didn't seem particularly likely to gloat evilly about his plans to come. Not to Izuku at any rate.

Six months in the care of All For One and Tsubasa. Six months of… Izuku really didn't want to think about what they did to save him from crush injuries. Medical care from the creators of the Noumu had been enough to make him gag. Thinking about it any further at the moment wasn't going to help the ball twisting in his chest.

Six months of his life gone… What happened in those six months? There was no way of knowing, no way of going back. It was gone. Just like Izuku. So much time was lost, was never coming back. Did it even matter if he escaped at this point? Did it matter if he was found? Six months was more than long enough for people to move on and get over it. For the world to keep spinning, with him not on it.

A long delay then… "It's closer to seven, really." Izuku felt the wince through the arms wrapped around him. "You waking up was miraculous and most of my time has been spent ensuring that you did wakeup."

Izuku watched the radio shake in his hand. Izuku set it down. "Why… *what* possessed you to wait that long?"

"It's not that long for me, Izuku," and Izuku could hear the smirk in All For One's voice.

"Right, you're older than most people's great great great great grandparents," Izuku faintly exhaled. "Seven months is nothing to you." What was seven months to centuries of scheming? All For One wasn't making any great sacrifices here with his lifespan being so long.

"Are you calling me an old man?" Indignant or amused? Izuku couldn't tell.

"Would you prefer elderly citizen?" Izuku queried weakly, feeling his stomach heave. He survived seven months in a coma and was going to die because he called All For One old. Kacchan would have found it funny. Izuku strangled down a sob.

"No," All For One slowly whispered, almost as if it was to himself. "Old man is fine." Another involuntary shudder ran through Izuku,

courtesy of his captor.

Izuku bit down a hysterical laugh. Guess Kacchan was out of luck.

Seven months. All For One had been loitering around him for seven months. Seven months of doing what? “Seven months still feels like a long time though for you to be sitting around, doing nothing,” Izuku aimed into the dark beyond. He wasn’t entirely sure he wanted the answer to that question. He wasn’t sure he wanted the answer to any of his questions, because when the person answering was All For One, you were guaranteed some sort of misfortune.

“Your care required far more attention than nothing. So much has gone into keeping you alive and coherent. The time went by quickly and…” All For One paused awkwardly, “I was willing to wait substantially longer.”

“You not telling me why is making this worse.” Not that All For One cared if he was making it worse. If he did, he would have put Izuku out of his misery the first time he asked.

“Breathe slowly and deeply. Panicking isn’t going to help, even if it is the natural response to stress. My goal isn’t to cause you harm,” All For One was coaxing, as if Izuku was a particularly problematic lion that’d fallen from the sky.

“I don’t have any proof of that.” There was absolutely nothing to say that All For One wasn’t planning an event that was bad news for everyone. Just because Izuku hadn’t seen it yet didn’t mean that it wasn’t there lurking in the background.

Why did his chest hurt? It was so tight, like his ribs were flexing inwards.

“I would love to tell you, but the consequences of your new found knowledge may be… undesired,” All For One enunciated clearly. “I do have a reputation of profound villainy to keep afloat, after all and excessive detailing of plans fits neatly into that niche.” All For One paused theatrically and Izuku felt him extend an arm that had to be for showmanship. “But this isn’t one of those times, for reasons with little to do with overt villainy.” His voice dropped to something far more mundane and his arm dropped. Mundane enough for Izuku to spin his head to blindly stare at him.

“How do you do that?” It was like All For One had slipped on a mask and for a moment been someone else. Someone who sounded far too

normal to be the resident supervillain. Someone who could have lived next door to Izuku happily for years without Izuku ever knowing his name or day job. Perfectly ordinary and forgettable. Ordinary enough to explain why All For One had managed to get away with his actions for so many years.

“Decades of practice. Society happily created a set of expectations for what they feel to be threatening.” The centuries old fiend shrugged and Izuku shrugged with him. “I simply play to it.” Why was All For One playing to expectations? Shouldn’t he be the baseline for for villainy? There was a standard and All For One didn’t meet it now that Izuku thought about it. While his actions certainly screamed villain, his presentation didn’t match up with the modern view of a villain. Then again, All For One wasn’t exactly modern himself. He was original stock.

Izuku nodded, then frowned at the drone of the radio. Why wasn’t All Might being mentioned? This station normally did a round up and it had uneventfully bypassed it. “I’m stuck with guessing.”

“It’s not that bad. The fun parts is figuring out how things work,” All For One patted Izuku’s shoulder. “I have something for you as well,” All For One added and Izuku found himself lifted and deposited back into a sitting position on the bed. All For One footsteps echoed away, then back again. “Here, hold out your hands.” With unsteady hands, Izuku groped at the offered object with no small amount suspicion. Hard edges, a hinge… heavy, very heavy.

“A book?” Izuku asked, tracing his fingers along an embossed cover. Was that leather? It felt expensive. Padded as well. Definitely expensive.

“Open it,” All For One encouraged and All For One’s hands curled around Izuku’s own, guiding him to opening the cover. Resisting a violent twitch, Izuku felt the first page. Smooth, some sort of raised print? He flipped the page and felt folds. Another page. A set photo? The pages alternated between foldouts, prints and, from the glossy feel, photos.

“What is this? I can’t…” Izuku pointed at his head.

“It’s for when you can see again. It’s a scrapbook of all of the details and photos I could find on your associates and your family,” All For One murmured. “News articles, posts from fan sites, social media, some of the more credible rumours and anything else I could find… A

snapshot of the last seven months."

Izuku's heart throbbed painfully. *This* is what All For One meant by being occupied? Izuku opened his mouth and no words would come out. Hands smoothing across thick edges, thin edges, slips of paper, the gloss of photo paper. It could be an elaborate hoax, but if Izuku ever regained his vision it'd be immediately exposed. So why? *Why?*

"It's a more substantial apology for the time I've stolen from you." All For One had already apologised. At least once a day, and if not that, it was more. Not that Izuku had accepted it.

"You… you've been stalking my friends!" Izuku narrowly avoided shouting at him. How did All For One even know… Then it clicked. The Sports Festival.

"If it makes you feel any better, I was stalking them before you died. Interesting Quirks and interesting people. Bakugou's apparently moved in with your mother and the youngest Todoroki is considered missing despite making it to school everyday." *Kacchan… living with my mother and Todoroki ran away from home?* Izuku shook his head. *Oh no he doesn't.*

"No! Just…" Izuku almost dropped the book in frustration. "Stop derailing! Why were you stalking them beforehand?"

"Tomura was curious, so we had to look into your class before Bakugou was abducted." If words could shrug, Izuku just heard it happen. It didn't sound entirely honest. Classes 1-A and 1-B could be identified from the Sports Festival, but Izuku's mother? No, that was deeper digging.

"Okay," Izuku breathed deeply, "is there any particular reason you're stalking mum?" There was anxiety, then there was whatever Izuku was feeling that anxiety was patting sympathetically on the back.

"I neither confirm nor deny any allegations of stalking your mother." He was enjoying this, Izuku could hear the glee. "But Bakugou's leaving of his own home was quite… *explosive,* and so was his new place of residence."

Kacchan leaving home made the news. News, if it was within the last seven months, should be in book Izuku had just been given. That meant whatever made Todoroki go missing must have been in the news as well, but was he really missing if he was at school everyday? Sounded more like he'd run away from home. Was that because of

Izuku?

“You want me to read the book, don’t you?” Izuku sighed, still hearing no mentions of All Might on the radio.

“Yes.” Simple, to the point and mundane.

A book with seven months of life that wasn’t his in it. Izuku couldn’t smother his tears. Naturally, All For One still did it for him.

Eijiro wasn’t entirely sure what he was witnessing wasn’t a weird dream. If Kamino was a vivid nightmare, then the time after it was an ongoing, frantic struggle to wake up. Midoriya being… gone, Bakugou not being himself and just… everything. Everything was wrong.

What he’d just heard Bakugou say only magnified the feeling.

“There’s a Quirk stealing, multiple century old individual running around, preying on our country and he was the individual at Kamino who killed Midoriya?” Monoma asked slowly, reflexively stirring his drink.

Eijiro was glad Monoma had repeated it, because Bakugou sounded like he was on the verge of some sort of psychotic episode when he first told them about Kamino’s villain. Almost as bad as when they had to pull him back from digging through the rubble. Frenzied, unreasonable and entirely understandable. That didn’t make it any less concerning. Bakugou was different now.Everyone thought Bakugou was a tough dude. Key word there being *thought*. Maybe before Bakugou was the most amped up, manly guy in 1-A, but now there were cracks around the edges. Bakugou’s angry, irritable face wasn’t twisted in a scowl. It was set downwards, like he was about to start crying at any moment. Eijiro hadn’t seen him smile properly since before the building fell. They were all hollow. Empty and despondent.

“Yes,” Bakugou grunted over hot coffee.

“This Quirk stealing fiend is called All For One and is All Might’s archnemisis because…?” Monoma trailed off.

And All Might had an archnemisis… that no one had ever heard of before because he was such bad news. Almost like the guy had been erased from mention.

“I don’t fucking know. All Might injured him ages ago and All Might thought he might have died, but fucked if I know what caused it. Being a bastard and All Might punched his shit in is what I’d guess.” Even Bakugou of all people somehow seemed muted. As if the entire situation wasn’t real, as if the restaurant around them was just some mental space and not filled with staff and other patrons.

Other people, happy, laughing, sitting out there in the open. Why were they even in this corner?

“Then why do you think this All For One stole Midoriya’s body?” Monoma was trying. Eijiro had no doubt about that, but he’d seen Monoma’s mind melt the moment Bakugou explained that All For One could outright steal Quirks and regift them to other people. “All For One can take practically any Quirk. Why would he need to steal a corpse when he can stack strength Quirks? He…” Eijiro watched Monoma’s face crumple. “It makes no sense.”

Bakugou’s face set in a deep, angular frown. “All For One made Deku’s fucking Quirk in the first place. All Might thinks he wants it back.”

“I’m sorry, dude, *what*?” Eijiro felt erupt with no control. That couldn’t be real. There was no way. There was no way Midoriya would ever associate with League of Villains scumbags. Midoriya was nothing like that. Nothing.

“All For One is responsible for Deku’s Quirk. He was Quirkless for his whole life, then just shows up at the fucking entrance exam with a Quirk and somehow passes it. Broke most of his bones doing it.” Bakugou never looked up once, all Eijiro could see was a shadow being cast over his face. “We don’t think he ever personally dealt with the bastard before this happened, but that Quirk definitely originated from him. I don’t know when he got it, but it’s not like he could use it in public.”

Monoma recovered first. “That… explains a lot.” It really did, in the most sick way imaginable. “All For One can stack Quirks, right? Why does he want it back?”

“All Might doesn’t have a fucking clue and I don’t either. Quirk used to belong to All For One’s brother, maybe he’s fucking sentimental? I don’t know.” Bakugou slammed his mug down after a long drink. “That’s where we come in.”

“Bakugou, I know you want to help find him, but this seems like…” Eijiro fished for a word. “Like overkill.” Midoriya was dead. He wasn’t

coming back. Eijiro wanted to help as much as the next person, but here, here he just couldn't see the point.

"You don't fucking get it. All For One can only take Quirks from *living* people," Bakugou growled. Eijiro blinked and felt a spark. "Bunch of people went missing recently. Guess their fucking Quirks. Pain numbing, paralysis, electrical currents and suspended animation. There weren't any missing person's reports with those sorts of Quirks before Deku got taken. If All For One wasn't using them before, why the fuck would he need them now? The only thing that's changed is him taking Deku."

Eijiro swallowed deeply, feeling his milkshake bubbling away uncomfortably. Midoriya might be alive? What were the odds? Was he still Midoriya? Eijiro was willing to risk it. He'd done the same for Bakugou, he'd do it again for Midoriya. But this time, this time they'd have to be more careful.

"How long does it take for him to steal a Quirk? Even if Midoriya survived, there's no guarantee that he's still alive." Monoma sounded too reasonable, too detached. Midoriya might be alive!

"Because, Egghead, Deku's Quirk was something special. It can't be taken without permission and I don't see Deku giving up his Quirk to that asshole in his lifetime." Bakugou folded his arms. "No fucking way would he give it up."

"You're not getting it." Monoma glanced at Eijiro. "He's not getting it. You understand what I'm saying, right?" More tactful than he would have put it before Kamino. Monoma attempting to be nice… why did people only do this after someone had died? When it was too late? When the person who needed it most was never coming back?

Eijiro was pretty sure he knew where Monoma was headed. Did Eijiro understand that Midoriya might already be floating in a tank along with other people that All For One had left vegetables? That's what Monoma was really asking. It hadn't stopped Eijiro from going after Bakugou and nothing was different now. All they would be doing is trying to fill in the gaps and All Might would do the rest. They were just researching.

"I get it man, don't worry." But there was so much to worry about, like All For One catching wind of their investigation. The League of Villains couldn't be all he had if he was an old guy. There had to be more. "If there's a chance Midoriya's alive, then we should look into

it." Or risk never finding him at all, dead or alive. No body to bury, nothing for his parents. It was unmanly to even think about. Midoriya had already done the same for them.

"But *how* are we going to look into it?" Monoma's hands were flat on the table.

"With you, genius," Bakugou gestured at Monoma. "We're gonna find people with Quirks similar to what All For One took and we're gonna do some testing with Recovery Girl."

"That's illegal," Monoma bluntly stated.

"No it's fucking not, Recovery Girl's doing some fucking research paper on pain management and all of the ways Quirks could help in recovery. Got a bunch of cancer patients and people from the chronic pain clinic at the local hospital as volunteers." Bakugou reached into his duffel and flopped a stack of glossy pamphlets onto the table. "She's been advertising for people with all sorts of Quirks to come forward to help with the study. All Might told me about it." Weird, why was All Might talking about medical studies for pain management? Eh, wasn't important. Probably for some charity event.

Eijiro held up one of the copies and felt his eyes hone in on one specific section. One shining section that stood out on the droll piece of paper.

"But what has that go to do with us? We aren't licenced yet and even with Provisional Licencing we wouldn't be allowed to without supervision." Monoma was glaring over the pamphlet instead of reading it. He really should have read it first.

Monoma wasn't out of the ordinary in going out of his way to dodge the Quirk laws… Eijiro hadn't forgotten 1-A's response to his plan for Kamino. Something villains would do, eh? Eijiro wasn't sure if he wanted to be a pro hero if they were just meant to leave people to die because of a piece of paper. Better to man up and do something than just stand back and let people die, be injured… or be crushed trying to help others. Eijiro wasn't going to stand back and watch, he'd be on the cutting edge.

"Read the pamphlet, moron. She wants *students* to help out as well. It's an after school internship opportunity. Teach us all about handling ailing people on the field." Bakugou wasn't smirking. More baring his teeth while Monoma's eyes scanned the page. "You copy their Quirks, then we can test them to see what the fuck All For One's doing with

them. All in a controlled, supervised, legal fucking environment. Happy?"

Eijiro was going to hesitate a *no* from Monoma's expression.

Collapsing onto the table, Monoma sighed. "I know you want to help, Bakugou, but this is a class for future *field medics*. You blow things up, he can basically turn to stone and I'm whatever's accessible in my surroundings. We're not suitable for it."

SLAM! Eijiro and the people at the tables immediate opposite jumped. "What the fuck is wrong with you, idiot? *We're in the fucking Heroics course.* Do you know what that means? It means *we fucking save people*. The fuck are you going to do if someone's got an injured neck or spine? Fucking sling them over your shoulder like a sack of potatoes and then they never fucking walk again?" Eijiro leaned away from Bakugou's sparking hands and hid a grin behind his hand. "No, shit for brains, you lift them correctly, then fucking move them, but how the fuck are you going to know how to do that without being taught? You just gonna pull some magical fucking solution out your ass?" Monoma was planted as far back as he could possible go into his seat. "No, you learn how to do it fucking correctly, moron."

"Yeah! We can get more skills and see what's going," Eijiro pumped a fist and Bakugou leaned back and grunted in the affirmative. "And find out what sort of condition Midoriya would have to be in to require them."

"I agree that skills development is a good idea, but what am I meant to tell the rest of class when I apply for it?" Arms folded, jaw set, Eijiro leaned back and waited for the explosion. Yeah, that really wasn't the right thing to say.

No explosion, instead it was the most superior look of disdain that Eijiro had seen in his entire life. As though the haze and muted colours had pulled back and lifted. Bakugou stared down on Monoma, like he was he some hapless piece of gum that was attached to Bakugou's shoe. "It's a public fucking hospital, Monoma. Just invite all of 1-fucking-B and tell them that you're there to show up 1-A in being charitable or some shit." *You fucking idiot,* was the unspoken clincher. "It's your motivation for everything fucking else when you give us shit. Be useful with it for once."

Monoma sneered."What would Midoriya think of you being a nurse?" Eijiro rolled his eyes. That was just low.

“Midoriya would be at my fucking graduation ceremony, crying his fucking eyes out and saying how happy he is that I fucking made it through,” Bakugou threw back unhesitatingly. “He also wouldn’t be here working this shit out because he would have realised what the fuck was going on three seconds after hearing the Quirks’ names.” Bakugou leaned heavily on the table. “Here’s an idea, Monoma, how about you toddle back off to Fuckhead Lane where you came from, have a think about why you’re at hero school, *then fill out that paperwork if you’re serious?* And don’t bring Midoriya into shit when you don’t know shit about him.”

Eijiro gaped. Bakugou was going way too far. Telling someone to leave UA was just… yeah… no. “Dude, chill isn’t that bit harsh?”

“Fuck no. Jazz Hands over here cares more about his fucking reputation than doing his fucking job. We aren’t here to pander to every uneducated fuckwit who walks past. If he doesn’t want to do anything productive, then why the fuck is he here?” Bakugou would’ve been inches from from Monoma’s face if there wasn’t a table in the way. Up one of his nostrils, maybe.

“It’s still his decision, man. It’s not our Quirk.” That’s what it came down to, Monoma’s choice in using his Quirk. He was the only they knew of who could pull off something like this, so if it was a no it was back to the drawing board.”

“That’s true. What about my choice?” Monoma puffed up. “It’s a lot of extra work.”

“Your decision making skills are shit and so are you if basic first aid is too much for you,” Bakugou hissed across the table. “I’m tired of this shit, but so fucking help me Monoma, if your name isn’t in that fucking basket, the cafeteria’s getting a new hole in the ceiling.” Then, more levelly to Eijiro. “I’m fucking out, parents are gonna ride my ass if I’m not home soon. Fucking idiots.”

“Hey, yeah, whatever you need to do. I’ll take care of paying,” Eijiro nodded. Bakugou had already smacked in a lot of his own money with these meetups. Monoma wasn’t the nicest guy around, but bailing on the bill after he’d already helped them with Midoriya’s mother was even lower than the comments involving Midoriya. Not cool to use a maybe dead person for ammo.

Then, Bakugou was out the door, slamming it forcefully behind him.

Not a smile at the whole table in their first class meeting, but they

didn't have an idea then, no prospect of Midoriya being alive. Nothing to look forward to, no hope. What happened had happened, everyone regretting not telling a teacher about their plans. No happy outcome for them with All For One fleeing and All Might going MIA from teaching and hero work.

Now though, now they had *something*. Eijiro smiled toothily and turned to Monoma. "I'll take care of the bill man, want anything before we go? I gotta do that application too."

Monoma was staring, but that was fine, because they had a plan.

There was *something*.

The burn of bones breaking and crumbling, in slow motion. Crushed, he was being crushed.

Skin parting from glass? Concrete? What? What was it? Where was he? He didn't know. Pain, so much pain.

Then nothing.

Couldn't move, couldn't breathe. His lungs…wouldn't move. Why?

Hands numb, legs, numb, his eyes wouldn't shut… Why wouldn't they shut? Eyes drying out…

The concrete dust in his eyes, in his eyes, his lungs… He couldn't see, he couldn't gasp, *he couldn't breathe*.

Blackness.

There was nothing. Where was he?

Starting, Izuku's abrupt return to awareness was firmly anchored by the unnaturally firm grip on his hand. As though All For One's own had locked into position and seized..

"Izuku, is everything alright?" All For One's voice was more than a little terse.

"Um, my hand?" Izuku weakly answered, squeezing what little he could of All For One's hand in demonstration. In return, his hand was

immediately released.

“My apologies.” It sounded more genuine than his mumble to Kacchan, Izuku thought. But what did Izuku know? He had a week of… something and it wasn’t nearly enough to explain All For One’s behaviour. Not the saving his life, not the radio, not the constant contact and not the scrapbook, which, after sleeping on it, Izuku was convinced was a bribe.

“Why were you hanging on like that?” At an unholy time of morning (Izuku suspected it was their equivalent of morning).

“Pain Numbing. It requires skin contact. My trick for avoiding opioids and their consequences. Shame it doesn’t work on the wielder,” the old man mumbled under breath.

Izuku struggled to sit up. “Is that why I haven’t been feeling pain lately?” Was that also why All For One had attached himself so firmly to Izuku? The casual touches were cover for the Quirk… but was that the only Quirk? Why was Izuku being in pain an issue? All For One didn’t seem to care if other people suffered, going off the Noumu. Again, it came back to Izuku being worthy of other considerations for some reason.

Come to think it… didn’t All For One just admit to being in pain. Izuku frowned. “Why would you need it?”

“Did All Might tell you about our encounter before Kamino?” Izuku again lost his hand with the ever present IV in it, held floating there, grasped by All For One’s own.

“Not in detail…” *Why did I ask? Nonono.*

“I left a hole in All Might, his guts strewn out for the world to see. He retaliated while missing most of his internal organs.” Flat, affectless. Izuku’s hand was moving. “And did *this* to me.”

Tangible dread almost seemed to seep through the air. Moving, inching closer. Did he want to know? He couldn’t decide.

Izuku froze and then contact. Corner of a mouth, lips, cheek bones, then Izuku’s brain paused while his hand continued the journey. There was no nose, no eyes (just the impression of sockets), no eyebrows, no features above where the jaw sat. No ears could be felt. Thick, ropey rows of scary tissue sat in their place. His hand dropped slightly and Izuku feel a tube pressed up directly against All For One’s throat, with

far neater scar tissue rimming the edges.

All For One didn't feel like a human being. As though all of his features had been scathed off. All For One was faceless. Even if Izuku could see, there'd be nothing to see. All For One himself was *blind*. They were *both* blind.

"The nightmares from these experiences never quite leave you," he whispered.

"I-I didn't…" Izuku stuttered and his hand was dropped back to his side. What could he say? What could anyone say?

"You didn't know, because he didn't tell you. He should have told you about me before offering you that Quirk." All For One's less calloused hand was resting on Izuku's arm. If anyone had walked in, they'd have thought *Izuku* was the one receiving the life altering news, not just hearing about another person. "I was clinically dead for a short period of time. My Quirk suffered for it. He stole something important from me and then killed me in my attempt to take it back." All Might… stealing? Stealing before the maiming? That didn't sound at all like All Might, but neither did All Might killing a villain, no matter how evil they were or what they'd done. What *happened* between these two?

"I don't know what to say," Izuku confessed. Was there anything that could be said without an emotional response? There weren't any outbursts as of yet and now wasn't feeling like the most ideal learning opportunity. He needed to ask All Might, but was All For One being literal or was he lying? Too much. Too much.

"You don't have to say anything. It's not your fault," All For One sighed. "None of this is your fault."

Izuku had the strangest feeling that All For One was talking about more than Izuku's own clinically dead experience. What was this? Was it why Izuku was here and not buried?

"Go back to sleep if you can, Izuku. I'll try not to wake you."

At least there wasn't a strict expectation that Izuku would sleep… and he had a feeling that All For One wouldn't be sleeping either.

Izuku closed his eyes and thought of scars.

Kurogiri was more than a little apprehensive. Two detectives had decided to grace him with their presence. One was reading the sporting section of a newspaper and the other had a tray of three coffees with a plate of biscuits, which he slid across the steel bench with pinpoint precision. Why he'd been moved from Tartarus to this experience was foreign. No one spoke to him prior to these two. Whoever they were, they certainly weren't attempting to maintain police decorum.

"Don't mind us, had a late night," the detective with the newspaper groaned. "I'm Detective Tsukauchi, this is Detective Yagi." Tsukauchi half heartedly shrugged in the direction of his skeletally thin and chronically ill appearing colleague. The colleague in question was drinking from one of the coffees. How oddly informal.

"Why am I here?" Kurogiri asked as levelly as he could. There was no news on Sensei or Tomura or anyone else. Tartarus was an information dead zone. His memories ended at the bar, so that was of no assistance either. Had Sensei intervened himself? If so, why was Kurogiri imprisoned? Clearly difficulties had been suffered somewhere along the lines. Was All Might stronger than imagined?

Yagi sipped from his cup delicately. "Why do you think you're here?" A trap.

"I'm not going to play these games," Kurogiri said curtly.

"Sleep deprivation isn't a game," Tsukauchi commented from behind the face an airborne base ball player. "Kills thousands of people in Japan every year." Here Tsukauchi shot a knowing glance between Kurogiri and the oblivious Yagi.

"Work now, quip later, Tsukauchi," cut through the air from Yagi. "The stats will still be there if you close the page." Clearly Yagi just wanted to leave. The way he'd eye the door every few seconds… Did he even care about the job he was doing?

"No need to lose your manners, Yagi." Tsukauchi shook his head and folded the newspaper while Yagi gazed contemplatively into his cup. "Right. You go by Kurogiri, correct?"

Kurogiri nodded in his restraints. He could play along with safe questions he supposed. They didn't know his name yet, provided it wasn't a ploy.

"Let's just stick with that for now." Tsukauchi was scribbling

something on a piece of paper. “There’s too many charges against you to list. Your actions in aiding and abetting the attempted murder of All Might made upstairs a huge fan of you.” Folding his arms, the detective’s face folded into itself. “Suffice to say, being such huge fans, they want to know more about your part in what happened. All Might’s also very curious as to why attempts on his life were made given the lack of prior connections.”

“I have nothing to say to the police or pro heroes.” Cool. Calm. Collected. Attempt to ignore the savage dunking choc chips into black coffee.

Kurogiri’s furious glare betrayed him.

“Is one of those mine?” Yawning, Tsuakuchi nodded over to the two remaining coffees. With the rings under his eyes, it seemed doubtful that was in a fit state to attend to his employment.

“Nope. If you were on time you’d have one.” Yagi tugged the tray closer to himself. “If you don’t ask, you don’t get one.” Late to work presumably.

“No biscuits?”

“It’s a package deal.”

Tsukauchi rolled his eyes. “I’ll be back in five. Need my pick me up,” he sighed with true agony and left, the reinforced door closing with a snap.

Kurogiri refocused his eyes. Just in time for Yagi to fall into the folding chair next to him.

“Tsukauchi’s too nice to be in this job.” Too well mannered by the sounds of it as well. “I’m gonna level with you. I’m not here to be your friend. I’m here to find out what happened, leave and do something more productive with my life.” Yagi picked up the second cup of coffee. “We already know you were at the USJ. We know from media footage that you dropped Stain back into the middle of Hosu after a handholding session. We know that you delivered the strike team to the camp where the UA kids were. We know you were involved with numerous villain movements well before any of those events happened.” Yagi held up a finger. “What we don’t know, is why you did it.” Yagi shrugged. “If it were up to me, I wouldn’t particularly care as to the why. What happened happened and you should rot in a cell at the absolute minimum.” Another gesture of the boney arm.

“But my superiors aren’t me, lucky you.”

“I have no answers for you,” Kurogiri snapped. Typical police officer. All weight, no manners. As much attitude as a pro hero with more bluster than physical prowess. They weren’t getting anything from him. He would never betray Sensei’s trust.

“You know, I still can’t understand why you’d waste your life like this. What were you thinking? A Quirk as rare and useful as yours and your first thought is to go and slaughter some kids?” Yagi pushed and Kurogiri twitched. “Got a Warp Quirk, better go victimise innocent children with it.” That wasn’t it at all. How foolish were these people? He owed Sensei. Personal preference hardly entered into the equation.

“Aw, is that a frown? Kid murder not it?” Yagi smiled thinly. “Attempted kid murder is still on the charge sheet regardless, you know. Shigaraki was definitely into some child murders.” Tomura Shigaraki and Kurogiri were *nothing* alike. Kurogiri would never be so fickle. Never so disobedient.

As for the children? The children at UA were precursors to pro heroes. Larvae. They knew what they were signing up for when they entered those programs. A new batch of government dogmatics.

Yagi was still speaking. Mouth open, crumbs flying out. One bounced off Kurogiri’s restraints and he recoiled. “So when you teleported into UA to take copies of the schedules, how is it no one saw anything? We know Shigaraki destroyed the gate. Did you slip off and do it then?” Yagi asked through a mouthful of biscuit. “Babysitting is so rough these days. Surprised he didn’t run under a car while you did that.” What an absolutely abhorrent thing to say about someone. Was this the police’s finest? Disgusting.

“I did no such thing,” Kurogiri snarled. Did this ignorant buffoon think he could warp anywhere he so desired? Kurogiri didn’t even know the floor plan let alone where the staff rosters were held.

“Right, whatever,” Yagi dismissed. "So when you asked someone to get the roster for you, what did you have in mind?”

“I didn’t ask anyone anything,” Kurogiri snapped back.

“Right, right. So when you obtained the location of the camp with ESP?” Yagi drawled.

Kurogiri felt the last of his restraint slip away. Filthy animal in front of

him. “What makes you think I know about any of these matters?

“You’re the getaway driver. You can go just about anywhere you like and you gotta know somehow.” Indifferent, probably not even paying attention. “It’s fairly likely you’d be sent in to steal information.”

“You know nothing.” Kurogiri hardly had time to sleep while observing Tomura Shigaraki for Sensei. When was he meant to have time to be stealing schedules? “I go where I go.” Kurogiri turned his head away from more crumbs. “What else are you going to harass me with? Your poor manners? Your buffoonery? Your ignorance?” Snapping across the gap felt so much better than the inane rambling of an idiot.

“What can I say?” Yagi smiled. Teeth wide, bared liked a grimacing skull, the coffee cup set down with a slow rattle. “I’m a fan of all of the above. So how about we go with all of them? Let’s continue, shall we?”

And Kurogiri *couldn’t breathe.*

“That explains a lot,” Toshinori nodded to Tsukauchi over the teapot back at his apartment. Mr Yagi slipped off at the door like a well worn coat and Toshinori was back, as uncomfortable as ever with some of the screams he’d heard in the recent weeks.

“He seemed closed mouth to me,” Tsukauchi mouthed around a doughnut. Toshinori never would have found that bakery or those doughnuts without this investigation. The investigation that only happened because of his mistake in thinking that All For One was dead. His complacency doomed young Midoriya.

“He answered something I’ve been wondering about for a while.” Since the USJ incident in fact, not that he had the time or resources to investigate it himself.

“How the League knew the camp’s location?” Tsukauchi asked after a biscuit.

“More than that. How did the League know the scheduling for both the USJ and when camp events were running? The League busted in at the exact moment the activities were on and everyone split up, like they knew ahead of time. The kids definitely had no access to any of that information and Kurogiri’s comment confirmed that the

information came directly from All For One.” Toshinori waved his fork emphatically. Maybe they could find out All Might’s general teaching schedule with a glimpse at the rosters, but the camp? No one left things that specific just sitting out there in the open and students wouldn’t know where to find it within the masses of paperwork either. Drudgery was a handy way of hiding paper trails. Only the bravest would venture into those stacks of paper.

“That’s right, if Kurogiri has no access to the source, then by reason of elimination it’s All For One’s source. Kurogiri seems to be Shigaraki's handler by all estimations. We probably won’t get much from the other League members because All For One was pulling all the strings.” That was unfortunately true. All For One seemed to be keeping his cards close to his chest. “Was All For One ever the sort to deal with kids?” Toshinori grimaced. If All For One hadn’t dealt with a child before and young Midoriya was in the position Bakugou expected, then he was getting that experience now. At Midoriya’s detriment.

“Nope. Shigaraki’s the first I’ve seen this bent out of shape. Dunno why he bothered, so we should add that to the list as well. See if we can cross reference his appearance with any missing person’s reports.” Though if Shigaraki kept pushing his luck and screaming in Toshinori’s ears and into the mics, the department might personally ensure that he wasn’t ever found. “More importantly, our traitor isn’t going to be a student. Not with knowing that scheduling.”

Tsukauchi was tapping his teacup thoughtfully. “And deep dive background checks on UA’s teaching staff aren’t normally done because of your esteemed principal. He usually covers that, but I think we can dig a bit deeper. We’re looking with someone with a connection or a reason to be connected to All For One.”

“Quirks,” Toshinori inserted. “All For One trades Quirks for favours. First item on the agenda would be looking into any late bloomers among the teaching staff.”

It always was Quirks when it came to All For One. He just couldn’t help himself and was about to be greatly disappointed if he was attempting to have young Midoriya hand over One For All. There was no other reason Toshinori could think of as to why All For One would steal a body. And, if young Bakugou was correct, go to extreme lengths to preserve him. Even then, the thought of Midoriya being alive and suffering in All For One’s clutches only heightened the urgency. They had to hurry!

“Quirks, right. Naturally we can’t tell anyone else at UA, because as it stands, you’re the only one who’s not a suspect. We need an excuse to be there investigating without tipping off All For One’s source, whether it’s a teacher or a student.” Tsukauchi settled his cup with a the clink of a spoon. “Got any ideas?”

“I have a couple rattling around. Police investigate crimes, yes? I have an idea, but you might not necessarily like where it’s going.” To be fair, Toshinori didn’t like the idea either, but the people he had in mind weren’t like the League. All he needed was a big enough scandal to draw their attention and they’d bite regardless of the security at the school. If they managed to successfully enter, it’d allow the police an entry point into investigating the school’s security. Not incitement or direct responsibility necessary for anyone.

Fortunately, Tsukauchi seemed to already be bracing himself with another cup of tea. “Alright, let’s hear it. We’re not committing any crimes though or promoting them to attract police attention,” Tsukauchi warned.

“No, I’m thinking more of an official setup with full police knowledge.” Armed to the teeth, lurking inside waiting for the break in.

“A sting operation, huh? That could work. Who do you have in mind?” All Toshinori had to do was sell the idea.

“Have you ever heard of a villain by the name of Gentle?”

Chapter End Notes

Please enjoy.

If you want something less depressing, check out One Shot Wok for your dose of crack.

Prospect

Chapter Summary

Mining for probability.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The doctor wasn't quite sure if he heard correctly. "I'm sorry, Sensei, but you want me to do *what*?"

"His eyes, doctor. He needs his sight returned to him," Sensei repeated. "Surely such a simple task is within your abilities." Of course it was, but that wasn't the doctor's issue with the demand. It wasn't as simple as just giving it back, like it was for Sensei using his Quirk. Eyes were delicate. A direct link to the brain as Sensei knew. A mistake with those would lead to other, more serious problems.

There was another problem with the boy regaining his sight. Did Sensei even know what he was asking for? The boy had already awoken and panicked once and what were the odds of it happening a second time? The boy would feel pain this time, would have awareness. What would Sensei do to the doctor over the harm of a favoured guest?

Instead, the doctor swallowed, his tongue thick, his saliva ropey. "Sensei… if the boy responds poorly again, he may never recover from it… There are risks." That Izuku Midoriya might not ever recover if another bad turn were to happen. Even now those recovery prospects faded the longer time went on. As the doctor knew would be the case and had told Sensei on more than one occasion. Sensei had contingencies… contingencies that the doctor wasn't supposed to know about. Contingencies that seemed fruitless.

"And you think his blindness assists in any future prospects?" Sensei purred and the doctor fought the urge to wince.

"No, but neither will another near death experience." Blunt. He had to be blunt. Sensei was being unreasonable.

There was a long, terrible silence. They both waited. Sensei broke it first. "How long do you think he will live without any independence?" *Not very long*, the doctor silently answered. But what Sensei was

proposing was so much worse. An order of magnitude worse.

Clearing his throat, he spoke as clearly as he could manage with Sensei's will bearing down on him. "Just so long as you understand the risks."

"I understand," Sensei whispered and the doctor shuddered. Sensei understood… and didn't care.

Maybe Midoriya himself would be able to see sense and refuse.

Boredom wasn't a feeling Izuku was expecting to experience while captive. Terror? Yes. Anxiety? Yes. Uncertainty? Absolutely. But not boredom. Boredom that was eating away at him and compelled him to sleep when it became too much.

There was absolutely nothing All Might related on the radio. Nothing. Like he'd vanished off the face of the Earth. He'd raised it with All For One the previous day and received an unexpected answer. Unexpected because All For One rarely answered anything.

"If you're looking at me, little Izuku, then I cannot help you. I'm also unaware of what All Might is doing these days. He has not been partaking in any acts of heroics that I'm aware of." Read: All Might hadn't arrived to any of All For One's no doubt ongoing acts of terrorism."What about UA? He's still teaching, right?" Izuku wasn't even going to deny he was desperate. His fidgeting was a dead giveaway. A giveaway to the point where All For One seemed to find excuses to pin down Izuku's hands whether it was checking a pulse or sticking them back under the sheets.

"He's still employed at UA, but he took a leave of absence after Kamino. I've checked his usual hidey holes and found nothing. It's bizarre and in that we both agree." Izuku heard the gentle clinking of All For One's teaspoon before it settled. "Your guess is as good as mine."

And that was all Izuku had received. Provided All For One wasn't lying, as was the possibility, All Might was missing from the public eye. All Might had been there in the aftermath and then he was gone. No call ins, no sightings, no ecstatic people who had been rescued. No Mighty Reports. Nothing about his death, no one in mourning. Plenty

of questions though, like Izuku's, about where he was and what he was doing. The money seemed to be on All Might hunting down All For One and, just this once, Izuku found himself agreeing with the general theories.

Maybe it was more pragmatism. If All For One was busy with Izuku, he was going to have less time to manage and manipulate villains like Shigaraki. The longer Izuku held out, the more time All Might had to find and arrange something to deal with All For One. One For All was fading… and seven months on, Izuku wasn't sure if those sparks were going to be enough to deal with the calamity that'd been holding his hands minutes ago, but stalling was better then nothing.

Stalling was something Izuku had always been able to do, even without a Quirk. Izuku still wasn't going to risk tapping into One For All, but he didn't need to it distract All For One with long theses on Quirk interactions and his opinion on modern heroics. That alone seemed to keep All For One for leaving for too long. All he had to do was keep All For One busy until… until whatever was going to happen, finally happened. Izuku wasn't going to be around to see whatever it was, but he had to do something.

It was also possible that One For All had finally faded, that the fire had gone out and it was all for nothing, but to just disappear was unlike All Might. He would have announced a formal retirement, not just vanished. So what was he doing that required such secrecy? Izuku couldn't begin to guess without more sources. Radio just didn't have the detail that an article or decent video would… if he ever saw again. It wasn't like he could ask All For One to describe the pictures to him. The mostly blind leading the blind, with mixed results and All For One's inability to read traditional print offended Izuku more than All For One at this point.

Then, not too long ago, All For One had gently stroked Izuku's hand (making him jump what felt like a solid foot in the air) and told him that he'd be back later. Then the footsteps. Those weren't All For One's footsteps which were drawing closer. Izuku sat up and there was a familiar clearing of the throat.

"Midoriya."

"Doctor," Izuku levelly responded and let the silence drag on. He had nothing to say to Tsubasa. Not so long as Tsubasa refused to discuss his grandson.

“Sensei sent me to investigate the state of your eyesight.” Tsubasa seemed to be straining to get the words out. Izuku refused to let the hope blossom.

“It wasn’t your idea?” Why was All For One calling the shots on medical decisions? Weren’t doctors meant to provide suggestions for treatments? On second thoughts, Tsubasa was also involved in the Noumu. The last thing he was going to care about was doing his job properly. Not when the Hippocratic Oath had already been crumpled up into a ball and tossed into the bin.

“Sensei suggested that you would be happier with your sight.” A sharp breath. “I was against the suggestion.” Not surprising. This guy didn’t seem like the type to agree with anything that would help other people.

“Why?” Was there friction between the supervillain and his underling?

“Due to the nature of the experimental treatment we used, you might not be able to handle light. Your eyes are physically intact, but your brain may not register the input correctly even now. This… is what led to your restraints after you injured yourself.” But… didn’t All For One imply that the doctor was a risk to Izuku? It didn’t sound like he wanted to harm Izuku. Tsubasa’s refusal would leave Izuku dependent on All For One, something which Izuku was beginning to suspect did’t bother the All For One in the slightest. Tsubasa’s refusal would also remove the risk of this treatment, whatever it was, setting Izuku off again. “If I do make an attempt to examine your vision, I would like your permission first.”

If Izuku could still see he would have given Tsubasa a second or third dumbfounded stare. “Why are you only asking now?”

“You’re in a position to make this decision for yourself.” That hadn’t mattered when All For One stole Izuku’s corpse and rose it from the dead. Tsubasa had presumably been entirely complicit in that behaviour. It also hadn’t mattered when All For One spoon fed Izuku back into semi-acceptable eating habits (the food was nothing like his mum’s though). There was no choice. Not really. It was obey or face the consequences and Izuku hadn’t see the consequences. Not yet.

“You’re trying to subvert his authority,” Izuku murmured and felt the tiniest shift of air. Not that it mattered. Whatever Tsubasa was playing at would just get him killed and replaced.

“No.” Izuku didn’t believe him. “I simply feel that Sensei may be…,”

Izuku heard Tsubasa's levels straining, "… slightly biased when he's involved in your treatments."

"Biased," Izuku repeated, wondering if All For One could hear the conversation. Somehow, Izuku didn't think All For One would be terribly receptive towards his underling questioning what he felt to be his best judgement. Not with the previous brush offs Izuku had seen directed towards Tsubasa. He wasn't exactly in high standing.

"Biased," Tsubasa confirmed.

"I think I agree with his bias, then." Izuku felt dirty agreeing with All For One, but sight was a fundamental part of existing for Izuku. He was completely without any spatial awareness without it and still wasn't ready to do much more than hold himself up while standing. Disagreeing here would be like disagreeing with All For One just because he happened to breathe oxygen.

Or was this part of the plan? Have Tsubasa pretend that there was dissent in the ranks to foster goodwill towards Izuku's captor? Tsubasa was never a good actor and All For One had been painfully blunt… but there was always the possibility.

"You may not even regain your sight, you know. You might instead claw your eyes out like you did last time," Tsubasa pushed.

"You drugged me, last time," Izuku curtly observed. "Who knows how much of that was because of you."

"He has a point, doctor," All For One chimed in next to Izuku and Izuku jumped. How long had All For One been there for? Maybe he had heard the comment on bias. "You'll find my bias is entirely reasonable." Yeah, he definitely heard the bias comment.

Neither Izuku nor All For One needed any sort of enhanced hearing to hear, with great clarity, Tsubasa's drawn out sigh.

"Don't get your hopes up. This might not even work. Let me dim the lights."

Izuku hadn't gotten his hopes up in all the time he was awake. And with All For One wrapping his hands around Izuku's wrists, he was going to keep it that way.

Tomura Shigaraki spat at Yagi the moment the crushing weight lifted. Yagi casually dodged by leaning to the left. “What the fuck is wrong with you?” Tomura hissed, not enough air in lungs to give volume to words. Yagi wasn’t like the others. He was a different beast. A beast Sensei would warn him about if Sensei were here. *Why wasn’t Sensei here?*

“A great many things, Shigaraki, but we’re here to talk about you, not me.” Yagi was sipping coffee. Yagi was always sipping coffee. Yagi never seemed to run out of coffee. Yagi only ever left to get coffee. Yagi was a freak. Yagi was the biggest bastard in this police station and none of these pigs were exactly pleasant. At least they weren’t that Tartarus guard…

“I’m not telling you anything,” Tomura snapped. All he had to do was not say anything and the conversation wouldn’t progress.

“That’s a shame. I thought I was at least going to get your opinion on All Might,” Yagi shrugged. “You seem to be a fan.”

“What the hell is that meant to mean?” What were they after this time? They wanted something. What did they want? Why was it always fucking All Might?

“Exactly what it sounds like, Shigaraki. What’s your opinion on All Might? You clearly have some problems with him and students. Surely Tsukauchi told you that I’m also a *huge fan*?” Yagi drawled.

“You and every other NPC,” Tomura snorted. “You all think he’ll come running to the rescue and save everyone, but he can’t. He can’t!” Tomura laughed wildly. Then he caught the expression on Yagi’s face.

Yagi was grinning. His teeth were white. Painfully white. White like Tartarus. “Is that it?”

Tomura frowned. “What the hell. I answered your question.” Was anything ever good enough for these people? Sensei wasn’t this strict.

Yagi snorted, his teacup rattling in its saucer while he held it. Both sounded like death rattles, a skeleton laughing with lungs made of bone. “I’m sorry, Shigaraki. I shouldn’t laugh. I was just expecting more than that.”

“More? More than him being a fraud?” That’s all All Might was, a fraud to the end. Pretending that he could save everyone. He couldn’t save everyone. Tomura was living proof.

“Shigaraki, no one has a perfect rate. Not Endeavor. Not Hawks. Not Wash. Not the Pussycats. Not All Might. Nobody. Nobody expects them to either. Do you know why?” Tomura might have thought Yagi’s monstrous expression was friendly - if he was an idiot. There was nothing friendly in the glint of his teeth or the twitch of his eyebrows. Anything but friendly.

Tomura glared at Yagi instead.

“Pro heroes are human beings, Shigaraki. How the hell is All Might meant to rush to your rescue when he’s fast asleep on a rostered off day?” Yagi lost all attempts subtlety, leaning back in his chair, while Tomura’s jaw clenched. That… that wasn’t what he meant! “They’re all living beings who needed R&R and days off like everyone else. Despite what the media tells you, All Might doesn’t have the highest rescue rating of all of the pro heroes. Can you guess who does?” Yagi slumped back forwards and beckoned at Tomura.

But… Sensei hadn’t ever said that in the first place. Sensei blamed All Might for pretending that the pro heroes were any different to the so called villains. There was no difference. “The pro heroes are no different to me,” Tomura snidely pointed out. “The only difference is that the government approves of their violence and that’s arbitrary as well.”

“That’s not what you said though. You said he didn’t rescue you. You didn’t say anything about the villains being the same as pro heroes,” Yagi dryly observed. “Yes, there is some crossover between pro heroes and some villains, but when was the last time you’ve saved anyone? Hm?” Yagi jabbed and Tomura came screeching to a stop. Why the hell would he rescue anyone? He didn't owe them anything.

“So you’ll forgive me, but I think All Might’s rescue statistics are rather relevant to this discussion if you think them not rescuing enough people is the problem.”

Yagi made another point, but not the one he wanted to make. If All Might didn’t have the highest rescue rate… then why was he the Symbol of Peace? Why was he so popular? If he didn’t have the highest rate… then who the hell did? If All Might wasn’t even the objective best, then why the hell was everyone putting their faith in All Might as the Symbol of Peace? Why were they following his lead in attacking people? Why listen to him at all? They should be listening to the strongest then.

“I see I’ve thrown you for a loop, Shigaraki.” The detective winked and leaned forward, almost conspiratorially. “*Endeavor*, antisocial flame man himself, has the highest rescue rate and villain captures of all of the current active pro heroes in Japan.”

Tomura’s mouth moved faster than his brain. “What the fuck? How is that idiot beating All Might?” Endeavor who killed as many people as he captured? How the hell was he beating All Might on the scoreboard.

Yagi shrugged. “He works more hours and his family hates him. He might have more raw hours and raw captures and rescues to him, but he’s not Number One. Do you know why?” Yagi was winking again. Tomura was going to rip that skeleton’s glowing eyes out when had the opportunity.

Tomura mulled on it anyway. If All Might was Number One without the raw data alone, then the pro hero ranking system was operating on more than simple statistics. “They don’t… assign the rankings on captures and rescues alone… do they?” Tomura ground out.

“Correct. It’s also based on reputation.” Reputation? What the hell did reputation have to do with pro heroes pro heroing correctly? Who the idiot that came up with that metric? “If Endeavor didn’t have the personality of a burning cactus, he would in fact be Number One.” Tomura stared at Yagi as he spoke. Endeavor. Number One. What the hell.

Something about Endeavor strutting around in All Might’s place was just downright disturbing. Endeavor with his reputation for hair trigger violence, no different to any villain. Endeavor was one of the furthest images Tomura had from a pro hero. “Why the hell isn’t he Number One then? Why use reputation as a factor? It isn’t measuring their Quirk and how well they use it?” Even then All Might should still be ranked first. He was a freak, just like Yagi.

“Unlike you, Shigaraki, I bothered to finish school and get an education.” Yagi quirked his eyebrows and Tomura spat at him again. Yagi, unsurprisingly, dodged. Without effort. “So, unlike you, I know that the pro hero system was devised from vigilante activities back when Quirks were fresh. Trusted vigilantes, with perfect reputations, were selected to become the first pro heroes when Japan adopted the system from America.” Yagi waggled his finger and Tomura was struck with a sense of familiarity. “But wait, there’s more! America’s pro heroes were basically another wing of the military. They might

have answered to the police, but they were more in line with the American National Guard than any cop."

"What the hell. They were military?" Tomura attempted to sit up in his bonds and only succeeded in falling further into them. Why was it always fucking America with these stupid ideas? "Why the hell would you call an arm of the military "pro heroes"?"

"I dunno. Better than Uncle Sam's Super Soldier Program. That sets off the public." A hand was waved and Tomura's eyes tracked it. "It was pure propaganda. Something to encourage the newly powerful to protect the more widely common powerless. Your Sensei made a lot of friends doing that, then used and abused them." As if, what would Yagi know about Sensei?

"What the hell does this have to do with Sensei?" Tomura edged out. "I didn't think I was here for a history lesson."

"Let me break it to you gently, Shigaraki." Yagi spoke slowly, but not gently. There it was, the sense of pressure, building, creeping up Tomura's spine. "Your Sensei's problem with All Might isn't that he's the Symbol of Peace, isn't that he has some arbitrary public approval and it isn't that he's imperfect and can't save everyone." Yagi smirked. "Nobody with half a brain in their head seriously expects All Might to singlehandedly save everyone and you aren't brainless, are you Shigaraki?" Tomura was hearing Yagi, as though it were through a dense fog. He was too slow to answer and Yagi continued. "Your Sensei's problem with All Might is that your Sensei is over two hundred years old and hates the hero system because it didn't accept him in the first place. He's bitter and I get that. I really do. He's there, he's popular, he's got an army of followers, then overnight the pro hero system is implemented and he's a nobody. It must sting to lose all of that in an instant."

Tomura couldn't breathe. Lies. It had to be a lie. It had to be. Sensei didn't care about being popular. Was Sensei really that old? Was he really one of the first Quirk users? Why hadn't he told Tomura? Did fucking Kurogiri know how old Sensei was? Did he know that Sensei was a vigilante? Where was Sensei now? Did… did Tomura mean anything to someone that old? Could he ever mean anything to someone that old? Who was Sensei? Yagi had to be lying. Yagi the nobody.

Tomura needed time to think. There was no time to think. No time to breathe. None. Yagi. Would. Not. Shut. Up.

“Here’s what I think. What’s really happening here Shigaraki, is that you’re a pawn,” Yagi explained, leaning back with his coffee. “A victim.” He wasn’t a victim, he wanted to help Sensei! “Your a pawn in his long haul game to claw back what was taken from him by the new guard. His reputation, his influence, his access to suckers to fuel his Quirk. All Might is the Symbol of the death of that era and you’re just the hapless fool he picked to play the scapegoat what he recovers from the ass kicking All Might gave him six years ago.” He was not a hapless fool. *He was not.* “What he does after that is anyone’s guess, but we’d like to be ahead of the curve this time. Preferably before he blows another city ward up.”

All Might injured Sensei. All Might had to be in the wrong. Sensei wasn’t that petty. He wasn’t.

“I know it’s a lot to take in. I’ve got the boys in tech working on a projector so I can show you the numbers, if you don’t believe me. But in the end, this raises one very important question, doesn’t it?”

Nonononononono. He didn’t want to hear it. He didn’t! Why wouldn’t Yagi stop talking? Tomura needed to think and he couldn’t do that with Yagi talking.

“Why you? In the long game of your Sensei, you’re just a bit player travelling along the board,” Yagi spoke in a low voice, his fingers miming the movement of a chess piece. “That means the entire League of Villains are just pawns.” He was not a pawn. He couldn’t be. Sensei spent too much time with him. “So if you’re just another pawn in your Sensei’s long game of chess, why did he involve you in the first place? What’s the game plan in having someone as inexperienced as you take on All Might and get your arse handed to you? What does he get out of you losing?” With one final incline of his head, Yagi lazily stood.

“You’re lying. Sensei is coming still. He is!” Tomura’s mind was racing. None of this could be true. Sensei cared. He was the only one who cared when everyone else did nothing. Yagi was lying. He was just another liar. Just like All Might.

“He’s had weeks here alone and it’s not like we hid where we were questioning you. In fact, we made sure everyone knew about it. Even told the media. All Might’s been parked here waiting for your Sensei to pop out of a hedge and your Sensei never arrived.” Yagi was a facetious bastard. No cop or hero lover would ever tell the truth.

But how did Tomura respond? He’d called Yagi a liar before and Yagi

winked at Tomura, as if they were both in on some private joke. Yagi was a freak. Crazy.

“Well, I’m out of coffee. Have a think about it until Tsukauchi gets here. But, if you need anything, I’m here!” There was a solid thud to Tomura’s shoulder from Yagi’s “friendly” backslap as he sauntered by and left the room, slamming the door behind him. “

He couldn’t think. He couldn’t breathe. The air didn’t have enough oxygen. It had to be a lie. It had to be. But… if it wasn’t a lie… was it because Yagi was right? Is that why Sensei hadn’t come?

No, they were all lying to get him to talk about Sensei. Sensei would come eventually, he just knew it was a trap. He just had to keep his mouth shut until Sensei came. That was it.

“Doc,” Katsuki grunted, dropping himself into the seat. He was fucking out of options. If he went to someone that he didn’t know they’d ask a lot more questions than this bastard. That said, this bastard made his skin crawl, so Monoma better appreciate the dive Katsuki was taking for the team. None of them were down to hunt down an expert and ask pertinent fucking questions on Quirk interactions. Nevermind that one of them might fucking die if it turned out anything was incompatible.

The busy moustache twitched. “Mr Bakugou, it’s been quite some time.” That was putting it fucking mildly. He hadn’t seen this indifferent, goggle eyed bastard since the guy’s grandson went missing three or four years ago. Funny that no one fucking mentioned it to his school friends. Wasn’t that fucking convenient? “How many I be of assistance? Your Quirk was in perfect working order upon my last examination of you. Though that was quite some time ago.”

“School,” Katsuki said shortly. No need to tell him any important. “We’re doing extra credit.” Extra credit Katsuki’s ass. This was more the type of shit that’d go on a resume, but Tsubasa didn’t need to know that.

“And extra credit requires that you see me because…?” Tsubasa trailed off expectantly.

“We’re helping a bunch of patients at some fucking pain clinic. One of

the fucking idiots who applied is worried about accidental quirk usage. He was too much of a dick to come himself," Katsuki added in what he hoped was a helpful tone of voice. Fucked if he knew. "Teachers didn't say shit," because Katsuki hadn't told them, "and you're the only person I remember who does this sort of stuff." Katsuki wasn't lying. Monoma was extremely fucking worried about accidental deaths. Only it had nothing to do with them using their Quirks on him. There were going to be major problems if that fucking moron Monoma killed one of the volunteers while testing the Quirks on their volunteered lab rat Kirishima.

"The teachers never said anything?" Tsubasa repeated with a crease in his forehead. "Surely most Quirks are straightforward enough for them to give an opinion?"

"They're not typical fucking Quirks. They've got no idea what's gonna happen if they get used on someone. There's four in particular that this loser who applied wants an opinion on before he'll suck it up and commit. And if he doesn't fucking commit that's more work for us." That was also true enough. Katsuki wasn't wasting any of his limited time if it wasn't helping find Deku. This was one of the few ways they could do it without breaking any laws. Though Katsuki was prepared to take that step if they hit a dead end as well.

Frowning deeply, Tsubasa leaned forwards. "Very well. What are they?"

Katsuki huffed and made a show of pulling out a scrap of paper written in Monoma's shittiest hand writing. Could be his normal handwriting even. "Suspended Animation, Pain Numbing, Paralysis and Electrical Currents," Katsuki read off with unsuppressed anger. "What the fuck am I meant to do about that?"

Tsubasa's face twisted, warped, then settled on something that Katsuki couldn't pick. "Yes… you're quite right in that your teachers wouldn't know much about those Quirks." Katsuki was missing something here, but he'd have to grit his fucking teeth until he got to the debrief. "I can understand your classmate's concern about patients using those Quirks."

"The bastard has a point for once, who knew?" Katsuki stretched. "They're dangerous, yeah? What would they actually do if something got used on one of us?" What would they do to Deku? Who was dead, but maybe not dead? Who was fragile at best?

Tsubasa was taking too long to fucking collect himself for Katsuki's liking. His fingers had that fucking twitchy shit to them, like he was hiding something. "Each Quirk will have its own problems. Pain Numbing will mask any injury you might suffer while working in the clinic. Say, if you were to stab yourself on a needle, you wouldn't feel it. Depending on the severity of the Quirk's application, it might take other sensations away as well."

"We talking only minor pains or broken bone pain?" Katsuki grabbed another scrap of paper to write on. He had a notebook in his bag, but fuck pulling that out in front of this prick. It was too prepared. This had to be more casual. More indifferent. He didn't want to be there and, come to think of it, he really fucking didn't want to be here with this fucking creep.

"Potentially all pain regardless of source if it's capable of targeting those nerves." Like removing all sensation an extremely invasive surgery to keep someone alive? Why else would All For One need to numb pain. He seemed fucking indestructible taking on All Might. Couldn't be for him, and as All Might said, All For One didn't seem to give two shits about the Noumu. "You should be very careful with that patient. Next, Paralysis." Tsubasa frowned. "I don't suppose you have any details on how this one functions?"

"Nope, just that it freezes people," Katsuki shrugged. There wasn't anything more specific in the Quirk Registry entry that All Might had pulled from work. It was rare that any of these extra got a chance to see how their Quirks really ticked if they weren't in heroics or fucking criminals.

"Well, similar to Pain Numbing, Paralysis Quirks can operate in a variety of ways. Some operate on the nerves, some on sighting, some on other more exotic conditions. I believe Stain was in that latter category." Now wasn't that interesting? Tsubasa was following media reports on criminals. "They can last from a few minutes, up to a few hours depending on the skill of the user."

"Steer the fuck away from that one, then." Katsuki made another note. That sounded perfect for keeping someone still during a surgery… Not that Deku looked intact enough to breathe on his own let alone move. Katsuki blinked rapidly. "Electrical Currents? That shit sounds bad for people's hearts. Got a guy in class who can use electricity, but when I asked him he said it wasn't the same as his." Kaminari had been ambushed by Kirishima, Monoma and himself and looked close to shitting his pants in terror. Katsuki didn't think he was lying about

currents not being the same as his brute force solution.

“Hmm, well, since you’re in the Heroics Course, I’d presume he has a far stronger flavour of this Quirk.” Tsubasa’s face was creased. Creases that were getting deeper the longer Katsuki looked at him. “Electrical Currents implies control or creation of electrical currents. You’re correct in assuming that it could stop or start someone’s hearts, with the effects being more prevalent depending on the specifics of the Quirk. It is the current of a lightning strike that kills people after all, not the voltage. It could also potentially influence other nerve endings,” Tsubasa added.

Katsuki’s brain skidded to a halt on that one. Influence other nerve endings? “How the fuck could it influence other nerve endings?”

“The body is one giant electrical circuit when you think about it. Someone with enough skill could use someone like a puppet provided they manipulated the right areas of the brain.” And make Deku a literal fucking doll and that’s if something worse wasn’t done first. What the fuck was All For One playing at?

“That’s fucked up.”

Tsubasa stiffly nodded. “Quite. And the final one, again, was?”

“Suspended Animation. This one sounds the most screwed up out of the four.” The name alone didn’t say good things about the Quirk.

“Suspended Animation in and of itself infers that the Quirk’s target would be put into a deep hibernation,” the old bastard muttered to himself more than Katsuki. “Cellular degradation and general decay of bodily functions ceases entirely provided it’s a true suspension. Whatever it’s used on will cease to age as well.” Ceases entirely echoed through Katsuki’s head.

“What does that mean?” It means All For One could stick Deku under and use him as a fucking wall ornament if he wanted to, or worse. Or shove him into a tank…

“It means that a person suffering grievous injuries could be stored until it was possible to treat their injuries,” Tsubasa whispered, his hands trembling. “Naturally you wouldn’t do it unless it was an option of last resort.” A fall back, just in case nothing All For One had on hand fucking worked. He could take Deku in and out of the fridge as many times as it took to do whatever the fuck he was doing. And Deku would be there paralysed, unfeeling while that prick took him

apart on the table. And with All For One's age, they might all be long dead of all age, only for Izuku to wake up with All For One for company.

Bakugou felt a fist clench. "That's a fucked up Quirk. If someone's that badly off they'd be better off fucking dying peacefully instead of being kept around in that shit state. It's not fucking living." Katsuki really hoped that Deku was dead. Deku had to be fucking dead. Or was he? Because if he was alive… Katsuki didn't know what he fucking wanted, but at least the building had been quick.

Katsuki didn't want to think about it. Not after seeing the Noumu.

"I agree," Tsubasa nodded deeply, the creases in his forehead were at maximum reach. "When someone's in such a state, they are indeed better off passing away peacefully instead of prolonging their suffering or a false hope. Healing Quirks are rare, they may as well be wishing for a divine miracle in keeping someone stored away." How fucking bad was the Quirk if even this emotionless, spectacle wearing, blond hedge-lip was agreeing?

"Fuck. I'll let the fucking moron know so he can hide behind Recovery Girl's skirt when any of them walk past." They only had five minutes with each Quirk and patients were going to get suspicious if Monoma kept touching them. At least Katsuki didn't want some random fucking person touching him constantly. Patients had to be the same, right? "Thanks." Thanking this asshole for anything left a bad taste in his mouth.

"You're welcome, Bakugou." Tsubasa was still fucking shaking. It was even worse than before.

Mystery for another day. He had to text the group to let them know what the deal was going to be with these nasty fucking Quirks that Deku would have ripped apart in ten seconds.

"Doc, one other thing. What happened to your grandson? I haven't heard from him in ages and the old hag was asking." Katsuki spoke over his shoulder and watched Tsubasa fumble the door handle. Tsubasa who fucking trembled like a leaf in Half and Half's fire. Tsubasa who had a reputation for being a stony faced prick even when Katsuki was small.

"My grandson… was a victim of circumstance," Tsubasa whispered and Katsuki felt his own stomach sink. What the fuck happened to the younger Tsubasa? "I don't suppose you would have heard what

happened. After all, the media hardly deigned to cover Stain's non-pro hero victims. They weren't of interest to the general public."

Katsuki's thoughts came crashing to a halt. "What? When the fuck did this happen? Where is he?" And why weren't any of the former friends told about it? What the fuck? Why were so many people fucking getting sick or-

The old man almost buckled. "He was killed not long before Stain's capture. Never stood a chance. Not worthy of media attention or police reporting." *What the fuck? Tsubasa's fucking dead?*

"Was there a fucking funeral? Why the fuck wasn't I there?" Katsuki turned on his heel and snarled. "Why the fuck wasn't Deku there?" Not that Deku could even make amends for that now.

"No… His body was taken for examination and never released." He was fucking shaking. Tsubasa was fucking shaking. He was fucking hiding something. It was so obvious. Why the fuck was his grandson anywhere near a serial killer? What the hell kind of shit was that extra involved in to be targeted by fucking Stain? And why wasn't Tsubasa giving details? "The police never gave him back to his parents."

"But why the fuck didn't they tell anyone?" Katsuki pushed, jutting out his jaw. "They have my fucking number, at least. Why didn't they fucking say anything?" Why didn't they say anything when Deku went "missing"? Where the fuck was everyone? "Memorial services are a fucking thing, even without a body." Because they were still planning one for Deku. Deku who wasn't ever going back to his family unless Katsuki fucking did something about it.

"I… I don't know," the mole struggled out Katsuki fought the urge to take a running leap forwards and strangle the piece of filth.

"Now you fucking do. If you hear anything about it, let me know." Katsuki was a hair's breadth away from growling like some sort of feral fucking animal. Too many people he knew who just weren't fucking there anymore. Too many. "Anyway, I need to tell these losers about those Quirks." Katsuki turned to finally leave the office and was stopped by Tsubasa clearing his throat.

"Bakugou, one more thing." Tsubasa's dark lenses glinted. "I'm sorry for your loss. I saw in the news what happened and… I don't think Midoriya would be walking away from it under normal circumstances. I told him to give up and…"

Katsuki froze. That's right. He was Deku's doctor years back. "He was smiling, you know. Most genuine one he's had in years. He wouldn't have fucking done that if he wanted to be told to give up by you or anyone else," Katsuki spat. *If he wanted to be told to give up by me.* "Thanks." And slammed the door behind him.

Marching away, Katsuki texted the others, his fingers almost feeling fucking numb from how hard he'd been clenching his fists. Fucking piece of shit assbag of a person.

Deku turned into a doll by All For One, a chain of Quirks to keep him compliant. Deku being kept by All For One. Deku… being made into a real Deku, by the monster that almost killed All Might. Katsuki sped up. Tsubasa, dead like Deku. Everyone dead, because he was too late, because he hadn't checked…

Deku, Katsuki thought fervently, the image of All For One not fading from his mind, *please don't be fucking dead!*

This was beyond stupid. What did All Might think he was doing? He was nowhere to be found. Criminals were becoming more brazen. The crime rate was on the verge of shooting up. All For One was running rampant and All Might decided to take a holiday now? Was All Might really so off his game after All For One's public appearance? They needed the Symbol of Peace now. Not when All Might felt it was the time appear. He had a duty as the Symbol of Peace.

What was he even doing that required him to abandon his duty to the people of Japan so readily? Nighteye didn't have the answer, but Gran Torino almost certainly did. Which was exactly why Nighteye was knocking on his door on a Sunday when should have been doing other things with his time, like organising intel. The door was wrenched open so violently Nighteye almost lost his balance.

"Huh, oh it's you." Gran Torino grunted. "I guess you can come in, but I've got guests."

"Well mannered as ever, I see," Nighteye snipped. Who were these mystery guests of the old man? Even when Nighteye had been at the agency, Gran Torino was a distant and little seen figure. Who could he possibly have over when he was such a recluse? Former co-workers? Gran Torino didn't appear to be the sociable sort.

“Who the fuck is that?” One of the most raucous voices Nighteye ever had the displeasure of hearing called across the room. Its owner was on the other side of the room, around a repurposed dining table and a whiteboard covered in unintelligible scribbles. All in all, the space had more in common with an explosive strike than a living room.

“This is Nighteye, he used to work with All Might,” Gran Torino answered. Nighteye squinted into a dark corner and was met with the brutish and sneering blond face he’d seen at the Sport Festival. Katsuki Bakugou, no different to his last television appearance. One would have thought being abducted for this abrasive behaviour would have mellowed him, but apparently not. Beside him was a girl, and four boys, heads deep in conversation. As though they hadn’t heard the vulgar shout across the space. One of them was most certainly the Todoroki boy, but the other three he couldn’t recognise. Not from the backs of their heads at least. Not when they weren’t bothering to make eye contact or express any proper greetings.

“Nighteye, these are some students from UA I’m helping with an extra credit project. So they don’t kill anyone when they get to the hospital,” Gran Torino nodded. “That loud one is Bakugou, then there’s Monoma, Yaoyorozu, Todoroki, Ida and Kirishima.” None of the heads turned to meet his eyes.

“Greetings, UA students. My apologies for interrupting your studies.”

All of the children greeted him back, still without looking, apart from Bakugou who grunted and they returned to whatever discussion they were having prior to his arrival. That was… rather subdued. Normally children were excited to see someone who had worked with All Might, but then again, a former sidekick wasn’t impressive when compared to the Symbol of Peace himself teaching them.

Then again, UA’s best and brightest were in that bunch. Bakugou and Todoroki, first and second respectively. The Yaoyorozu girl from a family of incredible wealth and esteem. Ida, his family famous for producing quality heroes. Then Monoma… Nighteye wasn’t sure who Monoma was… further investigation would be required to see why a nobody was brushing shoulders with UA’s upper crust.

“Let’s be quick. What do you want?” Gran Torino shuffled them to the opposite corner of the students. Gran Torino’s eyes were unusually red. Some sort of strain perhaps? With the old man’s Quirk the way it was he would have been better off wearing goggles to prevent the dust particles from irritating his eyes.

“All Might,” Nighteye said simply. “Where is he? He hasn’t been appearing in the media and he’s not responding to my calls.” Nor anyone else’s calls. Even Endeavor couldn’t access All Might to begin a debrief. No pro hero could find him and his secretary was having a leave of absence. After Kamino, All Might had vanished and so had Toshinori Yagi.

It was a chilling reminder of what the world would have been like if All For One had been successful in his murder attempt.

Gran Torino shrugged and murmured in an undertone. “Hell if I know. Toshi’s been busy. Dunno with what. He called and asked me to babysit the kids who were working on some extra credit medical subject.”

All Might was hardly a beacon of medical knowledge, but Gran Torino wasn’t one either. Why were they even involved? “Neither of you are medical specialists. Isn’t this Recovery Girl’s area?” What was All Might wasting his time on when All For One was freely running through the countryside? They had far larger problems to worry about.

The old man in yellow snorted. “Bakugou, get over here a minute.”

“Yeah, yeah, whatever,” Bakugou snapped back, leaping to his feet and stalking over to them. “You fucking burnt the taiyaki.” What disrespect. This was the leading member of the class? How disgraceful. Speaking of the class, none of them were even so much as glancing over at the kerfuffle. Was this a common occurrence for them? Bakugou’s poor, unfortunate classmates, having to deal with this uncultured individual. What would the public think of think of him? Would the media be ripe of disputes between Endeavor and Bakugou?

“I never burn the taiyaki!” Gran Torino roared back.

“You wanna fucking go me?! I’ll fucking kill you!” Bakugou screamed an inch from Gran Torino’s face, sparks flying from his hands. This boy was unstable. Was it even safe to leave him here? No wonder the League of Villains had been so interested. He seemed to be their perfect candidate from his attitude alone.

“Excuse me,” Nighteye cut in. “I believe Gran Torino wanted to make this quick.” And so did Nighteye if this was the quality of Gran Torino’s guests.

“Yeah, I did. Bakugou, what’s All Might doing?” Gran Torino barked and Bakugou glared back, instantly deflating.

“Fucked if I know. He didn’t make any formal fucking statements I know about, but rumours are he’s doing some sort of fucking additional training. He organised the extra credit as well, but I haven’t seen him around the school.” Bakugou kicked out a foot. “Can I fucking go now? I have work to do.”

Was that it? Was that all the boy could say with that filthy, unrefined mouth of his? “You could at least pretend to have some decorum. Your manner of wording things is vulgar and unbecoming a future pro hero. You’re going to scare members of the public.” Not that Nighteye could see Bakugou ever making it into anywhere near close to All Might’s league where the public would even know about him. The last thing they needed was another Endeavor running around, frightening the public or heavens forbid, the two speak to each other.

“And you could pretend to not be a dick, but here we are,” Bakugou fired back and Nighteye’s jaw dropped. Where had that come from?

“Excuse me?” This brat! Who did he think he was? They didn’t even know each other. Where was this hostility even coming from? Nighteye had given him a statement of fact, no more, no less. Bakugou was unfit to be a pro hero.

“You heard what I said.” Bakugou wasn’t budging an inch and Nighteye’s focus trained down to the one, insignificant speck of dust in front of him. “We all know why All Might dropped you like a hot sack of pelican shit, and it wasn’t because of your fucking pro hero skills. Imagine him coming into the office every morning to hear your whining bullshit about how you could do his job so much better.” Nighteye felt his face go red. “Like you’re anything fucking special. Can you even take a shit without using your Quirk?”

“You don’t know anything,” Nighteye hissed. This brat didn’t even know about All Might’s real Quirk let alone about the threat of All For One. He was another entitled brat who thought he knew everything about All Might, but no one knew as much about All Might as Nighteye did. No one. And it was no doubt this same attitude, this same refusal to use sense that got Bakugou kidnapped by the League of Villains.

“And you think you do, shit for brains? If Deku was here he’d shit down your throat, you ignorant fuck. Maybe you can just call All

Might and as-," Bakugou's rough face gleefully contorted, "-oh wait, you can't!"

Deku… the hero name of Izuku Midoriya. All Might's successor. All Might's missing successor. The boy infected with All Might's madness who had probably perished saving this waste of space. The boy who couldn't hold a candle to Mirio Togata. Nighteye's student would never have been left defenceless by mere rubble. "But he's not here is he? He's still missing after he saved you." It was cruel, but by accounts the two weren't on speaking terms to begin with.

Bakugou's hands exploded and Nighteye leapt backwards.

"That was out of line." He wasn't speaking to Bakugou, where one of Gran Torino's hands were resting on the boy's shoulder. There was no smile on Gran Torino's face. His lips were peeling back, his teeth exposed. "Leave." What did Gran Torino have to do with the missing boy?

"Real-"

"Now!" Torino shouted. "I don't know what your problem is Nighteye, but you're not dealing with it here. Get out." Nighteye pushed his glasses up and glared at both of them. He hadn't done anything wrong… but that clearly wasn't what the rest of the room was thinking.

Bakugou nodded. "You heard him. Fuck off and keep your fucking mouth shut about Deku. You think All Might's gonna tolerate you talking shit about his students?" Nighteye froze. Every single one of the students in the back corner were staring at him, their faces twisted. The Todoroki boy had erupted into flames. The blond Monoma was holding him back. Seconds passed, now Ida had latched onto Todoroki and Nighteye felt his chance for information evaporate.

"I'll be going then." Stepping around them, Nighteye bolted out the front door, followed by a roomful of narrowed eyes.

"You know what? I'll forgive the taiyaki," Nighteye heard through the door, "but how the fuck did you let All Might end up with that asshole?"

"He never asked me," Gran Torino growled, "but he'll be hearing about it this time."

Nighteye swallowed. What had he even said?…

Midoriya. It was something to do with Midoriya.

Chapter End Notes

Here you go, I hope you enjoyed. Updates are going to be a bit skewed with health problems.

Remorse

Chapter Summary

Too little, too late.

Or is it?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Toshinori almost felt his tea go down the wrong way. Almost. “Nighteye implied what?”

“He took a fucking shit on Deku, that’s what he did,” Bakugou snarled, flinging himself and his plate of biscuits down on the table. “Said that he was missing and shit, acting like he fucking knew everything.”

Toshinori let loose the most satisfying sigh he’d done in ages. Not something Mr Yagi could do while staring down the opposition. It was so nice to have a day off. “Are you sure there wasn’t a misunderstanding?”

Young Bakugou shook his head. “It was his fucking tone of voice that gave it away. The contempt, like Deku was a fucking bug or some shit. Like what he did didn’t fucking matter.” Bakugou’s hands were sparking alarmingly. That in and of itself wasn’t unusual. Young Bakugou trembling violently most certainly was unusual.

Now that Toshinori thought about it, he was only really at UA on Nighteye’s recommendation. Nighteye… who already had a student in mind. Mirio Togata, a committed boy, not overly bright in his studies and someone who had a great deal of trouble with his Quirk until recently. Togata who was meant to be the ideal successor that Nighteye had in mind. And that was exactly what Toshinori told young Bakugou after bracing himself.

“THAT MOTHERFUCKER!” Bakugou screamed, an explosion shooting from his hand and vaporising Toshinori’s quaint teacup. “IS THAT WHAT HE WAS FUCKING TALKING ABOUT!? THAT PRICK!” Bakugou slammed his hands down on the table in front of Toshinori, panting heavily. Toshinori watched the teacup go with a pang of sadness. It was his first cup of the day. “Who the fuck is even thinking of shit like that about a fucking dead kid?” Toshinori clambered to his feet and

rested a hand on young Bakugou's shoulder.

Who indeed would use a dead child to advance their own goal? Toshinori had been willing to overlook Nighteye's more… argumentative behaviour, but this was too far. When it came down to it, Nighteye had no say in who Toshinori would choose to be his successor. For him to be acting as though his input meant anything raised hackles that, before, only All For One had ever brushed. Brushed because of the sheer disrespect. Nighteye had no right to demean young Midoriya who gave everything to help others. Nighteye had no right to demean anyone, and that included poor Togata who wouldn't have the faintest idea of why Nighteye had suddenly focused on him.

Toshinori would be having words with Nedzu about Togata's internship with Nighteye. This behaviour was unacceptable and Nighteye had done it in front of UA students and young Midoriya's friends no less. Nighteye was unfit to be interning with any of UA's students.

"Nighteye has always had his… quirks," Toshinori instead offered lamely, clenching a fist. That really wasn't good enough as an answer, but his apartment could only handle so many explosions before his colleagues at the police turned up. And if both him and Bakugou were dwelling on Nighteye, then the apartment might not have a lot left by the end of it after Bakugou had his way.

"Is his Quirk being a giant fucking dick?"

Toshinori smothered a smile. Not in front of the students! "No, but he always had his opinions on what should be done with One For All, regardless of what I thought."

"So he's a giant fucking dick with a Quirk then," Bakugou snarled and Toshinori coughed with the discreteness of All For One's city buster.

"I have to admit, he was incredibly rude and what he said is in immense poor taste to both young Midoriya and his family. I also never asked for nor wanted his opinion on One For All. His main job with intelligence gathering with some filing," Toshinori explained. "I just about had to tell him because he wouldn't leave me alone otherwise." He was also such a shut in that All For One never wasted his time targeting him, much to Toshinori's relief. A bonus if there was ever one.

"Yeah, I guess you couldn't fucking not tell him something when he

was so desperate to shove his his head up your arse," Bakugou grunted, pulled away from Toshinori and hurled himself into the chair.

Toshinori smiled thinly, making his way back to his own seat. "He was a huge fanboy."

"Now he's just an entitled dickhead, huge fanboy or not. Shitting on a fucking dead person because his fucking student didn't get a Quirk when he already had one. Fuck off," Bakugou growled. "Deku didn't even have a fucking Quirk to begin with and it didn't stop him from doing shit," Bakugou struggled out, as if the sentence had been caught in his throat. It made Toshinori's throat catch too. "Why the fuck would his favourite need two?" Why indeed…

"With One For All comes All For One and the feud. Nighteye endangered his student by grooming him to take my place. Engaging All For One is an informed choice and I, regretfully, was under the impression that All For One was dead and so failed to tell young Midoriya of the external risks." And subsequently had gotten young Midoriya killed. If only he could take it all back and tell him. At least with Togata, Toshinori could attempt to correct whatever damage Nighteye's manipulation of the young student had done before it got him severely injured or killed. Nighteye was out to prove a point that Togata might not survive.

"Deku would have fucking jumped on being taught by you even without your Quirk," Bakugou said so quietly Toshinori almost missed it. Toshinori didn't doubt it.

"If it wasn't for him trying to save you, I never would have considered for him that Quirk you know…" Toshinori sighed. "He asked me before if he could become a pro hero and I said no." What a mistake that had been. Who knows what would've happened after Toshinori crushed his hopes and dreams? Nothing good. Nothing ever good came of such harshness to a child.

"How the fuck did you even know who he was?"

"The villain who attacked you had in fact attacked young Midoriya first. I rescued him from certain death." Toshinori, sank further into his seat than he thought was possible. More like delayed the poor boy's death. How was he going to tell Inko Midoriya about what happened to her son? It ultimately fell to him… but nothing he rehearsed sounded nearly good enough for a woman who was now

almost catatonic.

“Fuck, so he…” Bakugou was clearly struggling.

“Yes, he knew exactly what was going to happen if he got too close and he did it anyway,” Toshinori sighed more deeply than he ever had before.

“I fucking told him to jump off a building that morning you know, so he could get a Quirk in the next life,” Bakugou said suddenly and Toshinori froze and his eyes flicked upwards. “But I guess a fucking villain attack was just as good in the end, wasn’t it?” Young Bakugou’s face was so heavily pinched that it filled Toshinori with dread about what was coming next.

“Why, young Bakugou? Why would you say such an awful thing to someone?” Toshinori could guess why after meeting boy’s mother. What sort of parent blamed their child for being kidnapped by a number of adults?

“He never had a fucking Quirk,” Bakugou bit out. “All my parents fucking did was *Quirk this, Quirk fucking that. All Might’s got a great Quirk!* And you know what? The were full of fucking shit,” Bakugou spat so viciously Toshinori saw the spittle fly. “What Deku wanted to do had nothing to fucking do with a Quirk. He wanted to help people and all that really needs is some fucking problem solving.”

“He has already proved that in more combat orientated areas, hasn’t? He made it all the way to Todoroki before he had to use One For All in any great capacity.” Bakugou wasn’t wrong. Any Quirkless person competent with a sniper rifle would make short work of Toshinori even with One For All. They were all in the end quite human, as young Midoriya had proven.

“I was at home and I fucking walked in on the hag saying to my old man that if Deku had better control he could have punched the building away,” Bakugou hissed into his crossed arms. “We had a fight about it, I called her useless and said if she started talking shit again I was going to blow her arms off and see how well she did.”

That was… a tad graphic, even by young Bakugou’s standards. “Isn’t that bit harsh?” Also criminal, but Toshinori was going to give him a pass. He wouldn’t have been much better in the same circumstances, not after already living through it.

“Fuck no. I spent over a fucking decade treating him like shit because

of that bullshit. Fifteen fucking years." Thumping the table again, Bakugou stared. "And you know what I found out checking out those Quirks? That Quirks don't mean fucking shit. Like Deku used to say, there's too many to count, but that doesn't mean shit if you've got the wrong matchup or they can take you out another way. Who can counter a fucking nuke being set off?"

Just about no one, Toshinori silently answered. He'd looked before to try and counter All For One's more destructive tendencies to no avail. One day… maybe.

"I spent all those years treating him and those kids I grew up with like shit… and you know what I found out?" Toshinori hand was hidden under the table with Aizawa's contacts drawn up while young Bakugou fumed. "Stain murdered Tsubasa, one of the kids who used to hang out with us in elementary school. Neither of us even got an invite to the fucking funeral."

Midway through the motion, Toshinori's finger halted. "What? When did this happen and how did you find out?" Stain had murdered a child? Why wasn't this in the newspapers? Stain's reputation would've been flushed down the proverbial toilet, never to be seen or heard from again.

"His grandfather told me when I saw him. Gave me his fucking condolences for Deku. Should have been clearer telling him to shove them up his arse. Guy was always a condescending prick."

"Unbelievable…." What were the odds? Apart from being extremely small.

"Deku does all that fucking work, with me out to get him, with Tsubasa out to get him, everyone out to get him…then he goes and fucking dies, saving me. So what was the fucking point? If Quirks have nothing do with fucking anything, why did I-I, why the fuck did I treat him like shit because of it? Why the fuck did I think he was lying and hiding shit from me? What the fuck was wrong with me?" Bakugou was scrubbing at his face, but Toshinori had already seen the tears.

"You're a child, young Bakugou and you are what your parents and the people around make you," Toshinori explained gently. "If your parents tell you one thing and the rest of society agrees with it, then logically what else are you meant to think?"

"I shouldn't have been a brainless fucking idiot and I should have told them to fuck off," Bakugou tried to snap through heaving sobs.

“Fucking Deku didn’t need people telling him what to fucking do.”

“No,” Toshinori sighed, “he just broke the law and got away with it whenever he felt like.” Until it caught up with him. Young Midoriya wasn’t the sort to stridently follow the law if he thought an injustice was taking place.

“I wouldn’t fucking be here if he hadn’t, so why fuck do people only talk about Quirks? They don’t even fucking see them the way Deku did. They don’t know shit.” No one really saw Quirks the way young Midoriya did… well, that was a lie. There was one other person who had that in common with him.

Grimacing in spite of himself, Toshinori answered. “The only person I’ve seen treat Quirks with as much attention as young Midoriya is All For One. I used to wonder what would happen if the two ever met.”

“Deku would give him shit for his combinations,” Bakugou said with the most certainty Toshinori had heard during the boy’s visit. “Either that or fucking start asking about them midway through them trying to kill each other like they were having tea or some shit.”

“Yes, I can see that happening.” It said a lot about both All For One and young Midoriya that Toshinori could imagine both of those situations with some clarity. Something that was never going to happen with a small child’s corpse instead of a quiet boy who loved what he did.

“So what the fuck do I do now? Everything’s fucking bullshit.”

His entire world ripped out from under him, just like so many others who had lost someone and so young too. “All you can do is carry on, young Bakugou. Now that you know it was never true, you can improve upon how you treat people and help others.” And prevent another Izuku Midoriya from ever happening, to stop another pointless death.

“It’s not gonna bring back Deku.”

“It never does, but we do what we can.”

Toshinori pretended to ignore Bakugou’s quiet sobs and leapt for a distraction. Ah! “So, young Bakugou, how the goes pain clinic.”

Then Bakugou exploded a second time. “Listen to this shit and tell me what you think…”

Izuku couldn't speak. If All Might's wounds had been jaw dropping, All For One's were in another category entirely. The man shouldn't have been alive. The texture had been one thing, but even with the fine detail obscured by sunglasses, Izuku could see the ropey scare tissue that had replaced almost every dominant feature on the man's face. All For One was a literal faceless man. Izuku stared. Not quite as much as he'd stared at his gown which had T-shirt stamped across it in bold lettering, but stared none the less.

All Might was down a stomach, his lungs damaged… all from that central penetrating wound. All For One though had sustained serious damage to his skull, breathing through the gaping hole in his throat… With this context, Izuku could only draw comparisons to an animal attack more than any fight between heroes and villains. As if if two polar bears had savaged each other over territory.

All For One patted Izuku on the shoulder and Izuku jumped. Izuku hadn't seen him move. "I'm glad I warned you before you got some semblance of sight back." That was nice of him. Or manipulative. Either way, warning wasn't ever going to cure the reality.

"What… what did you two do to each other?" Izuku whispered, feeling ill. There was no way they both weren't going for the kill. All Might wouldn't have made it without Recovery Girl. All For One wouldn't have made it without his Quirks. Both husks of what they used to be in their primes. So much violence for what? What caused this? What convinced All Might that All For One had to be deader than dead with those injuries? Izuku had a sneaking suspicion but plenty of other criminals hadn't been so badly brutalised by All Might.

"Admittedly, it probably was somewhat excessive, in hindsight." Now Izuku could see All For One shrug. The slightest creasing of the suit around his shoulders, how closely he was nestled to Izuku's person and him likely being there for months overseeing his unconscious body. Izuku almost wished he didn't have his sight back. "Too little, too late now."

"Why? Why do it in the first place?" Izuku breathed out. "What's the point?" Was it worth living like this after the fact?

"I can't speak for All Might, but for me it was definitely worth it," All For One nodded. What was worth dying or nearly dying for someone who was so old?

“What was so important that you almost killed yourself doing it?”

“Was saving your classmates really worth your life?” All For One instead asked, his chin resting on folded fingers.

“Yes,” Izuku answered without hesitation and saw All For One’s immediate frown.

“I would see your point more if Bakugou wasn’t involved in that rescue,” All For One slipped in and Izuku was left wondering what his problem with Kacchan was in the first place. Surely the televised Sports Festival hadn’t left that much of a bad impression? “Oh well, but you can understand the sort of area that would compel such risk taking.” Something time sensitive.

Then it clicked. “You were protecting something?” Izuku squinted at All For One who leaned back away from the light, cloaking what was little of his face in shadow. “Something worth more than you?” Izuku asked, more of himself than All For One. What was worth more than their own person to someone with a deliberately acquired longevity Quirk?

“Whatever gives you that impression?” All For One smoothly asked and Izuku resisted the urge to fidget. He wasn’t the one who had to give answers here.

“Your age,” Izuku said after a moment of thought. “You’ve outlived people before. That means the only things that matter are ones that you can’t outlive.” All For One didn’t strike Izuku as a terribly material person either. Not with the barebones quality of the room and everything else. His suit was fine in quality, but how much of that was to avoid it chafing on scar tissue? It was something… something like a person. Was it a person All For One was protecting?

“Is there anything about me that you can’t use as ammunition?” All For One leaned back into the light. A deflection. Izuku wasn’t getting any continuity from that topic.

Izuku shook his head and All For One smirked.

“Though that does raise a question…” Izuku braced himself. “Why is that you put your friends ahead of yourself when you threw them out the way? You knew what was coming and made no attempt to save yourself, from your lack of defensive wounds.” Izuku blinked. That was a really strange change in topic, even for All For One.

“Oh, that’s easy,” Izuku absentmindedly stated. “I didn’t have time and I forgot.”

“You forgot that you had a Quirk?” Not quite disbelief, but offended sounding nonetheless.

“My Quirk needs concentration to use it properly and I don’t have as much practice with it as I’d like.” And now never would. “It was so fast… I think I was just as likely to kill myself with it as the building was to fall on me.” Wincing, Izuku remembered All Might’s story about the previous wielder of One For All. Kill himself or never use his hands again.

“Your parents are preparing for your funeral because you All Might was so slow in giving you that Quirk that you forgot about it in a moment of panic.” All For One restated and Izuku shrugged. Izuku really doubted that his dad was going to be involved. Izuku’s funeral wouldn’t be missing out on too much with both Izuku himself and Hisashi missing from it.

“It’s not like even both of my parents would be at my funeral.” Izuku swallowed in a nervous laugh. Not that Izuku was sure if there’d been one or a service yet. He’d only flicked through the opening pages of All For One’s scrapbook and so far it was painting a picture of mass casualties. In those numbers, Izuku was just a very small part of a more tragic statistic. A statistic that hadn’t got much of a mention, to his relief.

In the meantime, there was silence. Complete dead air, as if All For One had held his breath.

“Why,” All For One slowly enunciated, “would you even think such a terrible thing let alone say it?” Why not? This was Hisashi they were talking about, someone Izuku hadn’t even spoken to before, let alone met.

“Because it’s true.” And Izuku didn’t have a shred of doubt behind that thought either. “I bet you there isn’t a single mention of dad anywhere in the news, that he wasn’t publicly seen with mum and he didn’t make any statements to the media. That scrapbook won’t have a single mention of him.” After shifting his weight, Izuku continued. “If he wasn’t there after Muscular almost killed me, he’s definitely not going to be around for an empty casket.” Even calling the missing man dad felt wrong. Izuku didn’t have a father. Not for a very very long time.

No response, just a deepening frown from his captor.

“That’s why taking One For All never bothered me.” Izuku shrugged. Even after All For One was flagged as being a problem, even after the injuries, Izuku had no regrets. “All Might warned me that it can blow people apart just using it… but even if it did, I don’t think the world would stop spinning for anyone. Life goes on.” Especially not his father, wherever he was and whatever he was doing. Izuku hadn’t ever had any contact with him. Even All For One raising parents instead of parent felt odd. Odd because he used a plural. But the plural was the natural assumption, so Izuku couldn’t find a fault in the reasoning at present. All For One expected both of his parents to be there in some capacity. He was wrong.

“Because it’s only you?” All For One whispered.

“It’s only me,” Izuku confirmed. Izuku wasn’t anything special. He knew that and so did everyone else. He met All Might by chance and he was only in this position because of that chance. “Nobody else knows about my Quirk or anything else. I don’t have anyone to tell.” Kacchan and Izuku weren’t exactly friends these days… and probably never would be with Izuku in this position. The rest of 1-A… Izuku just didn’t know them that well. Not nearly enough to tell them about One For All, or his problems with the Quirk. Not well enough to place All Might at risk. All Might whose ability to use One For All was dwindling. All Might who was going to be exposed to All For One again.

“What about your mother?” Izuku’s mother was also out of the question. Telling her things had been a habit previously… but the longer Izuku went without telling her how his day was going the easier it became to not say anything at all. All it did was make her worry. Everything made her worry, but Izuku in particular made her worry. Worry she didn’t deserve. She wouldn’t have to worry anymore. No one would.

“I didn’t think it’d make her feel any better… She can’t change anything, and I couldn’t either.” Izuku couldn’t change his mother’s lack of support or her unwillingness to talk about the issue and she wasn’t willing to change it. Because of Izuku’s father? He didn’t know. “It’s just stress she didn’t need.” Not when it was inevitable. All Might and had been a thread Izuku had clung to for years. Since the beginning and now Izuku had broken it. One For All was technically in All For One’s hands… and Izuku wasn’t going to waste the hopes of anyone else after Kamino. All Might didn’t have enough left in him for a round two.

All For One flinched. “And that’s how you justify not telling her anything… that she can’t do anything to help you…” Izuku assumed the old man had forgotten the inflection for a question.

“Well,” Izuku paused awkwardly, “I don’t know if it’s because she can’t or -” Izuku swallowed nervously “-won’t. Mum wasn’t ever really happy with me wanting to be a pro hero. She never said it outright… and she never tried to help me either. So I decided to just not worry her about it.”

“She never knew how Bakugou treated you.” Another non-question. Izuku felt an involuntary twitch. How did All For One know about Kacchan’s behaviour? That wasn’t something he could glean from one event.

“No,” Izuku confirmed, watching All For One carefully. Then added to himself, “come to think of it, I never told her that I almost died on the way back from school either. I don’t think she ever would have let me anywhere near UA if she knew about that,” Izuku winced, still feeling the slime in his throat.

“When was this?”

Izuku stared at him through his darkened lenses. “Why do you care?”

“I did my homework on you, Izuku Midoriya. And nowhere in anything I could find mentioned an attempt on your life prior to UA.” Ah, All For One was annoyed at missing intel. That made more sense.

“When I was fourteen, walking home from school. Remember the Sludge Villain that All Might saved Bakugou from?”

“Who doesn’t?” All For One’s cruel grin gave Izuku the feeling that All For One was fond of that story for completely inverted reasons compared to everyone else.

“Yeah, he came after me first. I think he would have been extremely disappointed with his selection,” Izuku idly added, wondering what sort of the horror the villain would have experienced just to snatch the body of a weak, squishy, Quirkless teenager. “That’s how I met All Might the first time.”

If All For One had eyes, Izuku was sure the fiend would’ve been staring, dumbfounded. “And they never even told your mother.”

“We… sort of never told anyone?” After All Might had offered One For

All, the idea slipped his mind entirely. The less people who knew he was connected to All Might before UA the better. “No one ever said anything about it. I think I got a vague mention when I distracted him from suffocating Kacchan.” And a huge amount of scoldings from the pros there… who were doing everything but save Kacchan.

“You wouldn’t have anyway, would you.” Another creepy non-question. It made Izuku’s skin crawl.

“Why do you keep doing that?”

“Doing what, little Izuku?” He knew.

“The non-questions,” Izuku clarified, watching All For One stretch and crack the knuckles of his huge hands.

“I’m quite frankly in a state of disbelief that you almost died and, by all accounts, no one said a word to you about it.”

Izuku blinked. “Well, it’s not any different to any of the other injuries I had… The world doesn’t stop turning just because one person isn’t in it.” Not when the one person was the cause of all of the other person’s stress in life. Inko Midoriya would be a happier person if her son was anyone but Izuku. All Might… All Might was different, but saving Izuku wasn’t a fight he could win. Not anymore. Life wasn’t fair enough to let that happen.

“I have to disagree with your assessment that the world kept on spinning without you in it.” Izuku didn’t trust All For One’s deceptively level tone for a second. Not with the way the old man’s fists were clenching as he spoke. “The moment I felt the burn of your broken bones, the crushing and snapping of your hands and feet, the glass slicing through your skin… The dust in your eyes and lungs… The world stopped spinning at the exact moment I felt you disappear from Search.” All For One had to be exaggerating… but Izuku was still here and Shigaraki wasn’t.

Izuku couldn’t breathe. He was being reeled in by the same tentacles that tripped All Might. Too close. Much too close. The healing wound on his back pulled at the dressing as he was tugged over,

“If your death was so inconsequential to me, Izuku Midoriya, you wouldn’t be here in the first place.” Izuku heard All For One’s deep voice louder than ever through the man’s own ribcage, pinned as he was against him in a one armed hug that came just short of crushing him. “I’m not interested in your Quirk,” All For One murmured in

Izuku's ear. Izuku's mind spun. All For One had to be lying. He'd spent years trying to kill All Might. Why would he suddenly stop caring about One For All's wielders? "If I was, I wouldn't have pulled you from the rubble." Unless it was to do something worse, that possibility was always present.

"I don't believe you. I'm nothing special without One For All." Too close, too tight. Too warm.

"Yes, which is why in the short time you've been awake I've had more ideas for Quirk combinations now than in the last century combined," the fiend sardonically dripped.

Izuku swallowed. "It's not that special…" Not to everyone, but then again, they thought Izuku's speculations were a gross invasion of privacy. They weren't like All For One who was positively giddy over Izuku's observations. Giddy to the point of telling Tsubasa about them. Scary. Izuku still wasn't sure how he slept with All For One in the same room.

"That's not the only thing though." All For One seemed to pause for a moment. While he did Izuku felt years slide away from his own lifespan and shatter on the floor. "Every time that Quirk passes on I make a comparison to my brother. I can't help it," All For One's shoulders dropped and Izuku felt another another decade pass him by, his chest hurting. "It's like an extended game of whispers and every wielder is that little bit different. Only a little." If the story was told in the oral tradition, as it seemingly was, Izuku could understand the comparison. Who was told what this time around?

"And?"

"You're absolutely nothing like him," All For One said simply and Izuku froze. "The longer his life went on, the less he would engage with me. He had no tolerance for me or my ideas. What we wanted was fundamentally different." A shrug. "His successors were much the same."

"What did he want?" What could All For One's brother want that made them so opposed to one another? Why was he so different to Izuku?

"He wanted me to be a slave." Izuku's brain skidded to a halt. That didn't sound right, not from what All Might had told Izuku. "I saw no reason as to why Quirks couldn't be used for personal reason or gain. Within reason, of course, I was at the forefront of putting down

society's violent undesirables long before pro heroes were in the picture after all. I rather more fear that my acts inspired the trend." That sounded dangerously close to a vigilante… vigilantes who were the foundation of pro heroes. "But no, that wasn't good enough for my dear, little brother, because I wanted something in return. A Quirk, a favour here and there… sometimes it was small, other times something more, but it wasn't good enough for him." That couldn't be right… Pro heroes were paid for their time and that was accepted. All For One's brother, from that description, sounded more like Stain.

"What did he want then?" Was he like Stain?

"My brother would have been largely thrilled with the pro hero system, Izuku. The idea of us being subject to the government's whims, crushed with overwhelming force for daring to be as we are for our own interests would have suited his desires well. In his world, people only acted for the collective and never themselves." Not entirely like Stain then, who even objected to payment. Still, expecting people to forgo all personality when there were extremist groups around hating on other types of Quirk user really should have told All For One's brother that there was no chance of everyone agreeing to that. Hero or not, most people weren't going to wholeheartedly defend people who actively hated them.

As for following the law, the rules were the rules for a reason… but that didn't mean that exceptions shouldn't be made. The Yaoyorozu family alone were basically an unlimited supply of renewable resources. Ida wouldn't be alive if Izuku hadn't broken the rules and nor would Kacchan. Izuku couldn't imagine All For One's brother being such a stickler if he was as committed to justice as All For One said he was. But all he had was All For One's word for it and nothing else. Everyone else was long gone."Why do you think I'm different?" Izuku didn't want to hold his breath, but All For One's flood of information was making thinking without hyperventilating extremely difficult.

"Answer a question first and I'll tell you why you're so different."

Where was the harm? Izuku could always refuse if it was something damaging.

"Do you have any problem with me using my Quirk on people if they agree to it? If it was a form of bartering?" All For One's voice developed and edge and Izuku knew exactly why.

“He really didn’t like you giving and taking Quirks for favours, did he?” Izuku whispered.

“He thought that I didn’t have pure enough intentions to be offering the service.” A service All For One still provided to this day. Wolfram was one of those end results. Wolfram who chose to take the Quirk. Wolfram who was going to take down All Might both for profit and to repay the favour. Wolfram who, in the end, chose to agree with that deal.

“That’s not his decision though. They’re adults, they could have said no. They chose to do a deal with you.” These people had the ability to choose different paths, since All For One was specifying that they had consented. If they chose to indebt themselves to someone as dangerous as All For One, then they were no different to people taking a risk with their local drug dealer. Quirks being involved didn’t make the exchange itself any different. Even Kacchan, for all his impulsive behaviour, would’ve run a mile or ten if All For One offered him a Quirk for a favour.

Parents still spoke of things to their children, about strangers with offers that were too good to be true. Izuku less so than others, he didn’t have any worthwhile genetics worth stealing. Kacchan, Todoroki, Yaoyorozu and just about the rest of 1-A were worth kidnapping if only for genetic stock in human trafficking. For this reason, All For One would have a rough time with a friendly greeting let alone making deals with people.

Nothing though, prepared Izuku for All For One running his free hand through Izuku’s long woollen locks in response. All For One was undaunted by the flinch.

“And that is why you’re different.” If Izuku wasn’t mistaken, that was relief he was hearing, an exhalation loaded into the words. “You respect the differences of others, you compromise. You don’t follow the rules, little Izuku. You don’t care if you have a licence or not. You’ll always do what you think is best, regardless of the government, regardless of society. You came to Kamino to save Bakugou even though you could have been imprisoned, you eradicated Stain’s threat without hesitation or stumbling, you fought back against Muscular and Wolfram without a single lick of thought for any rules.” Izuku shook. He wasn’t saying what Izuku thought he was saying, was he? “I’m not going to begrudge you for using the system, Izuku, when I have oh so much evidence that you see the law as more of a guideline than a hard, impassable line like my brother did. You make

compromises just like I do."

All For One was saying what Izuku thought he was saying. It wasn't that important, was it?

"And, you don't know it or understand it, but that makes you one of a kind in my very long lifespan. Unique in every sense of the word. There are many people like Tomura in the world. There's only one *you*."

An exaggeration if Izuku had ever heard one. It was such a small thing and All For One was drawn to it? There were other people around, willing to break the rules. Todoroki didn't have any problems with it and nor did Kirishima… But then again, even Uraraka thought Izuku's Hero Journals were odd. Izuku was sure his whole class did and then there was All For One, who Izuku was almost sure to be at a midnight release if Izuku ever bothered to publish them. It still didn't explain everything.

"That still doesn't explain why…" Izuku pointed at All For One's one armed grip. It didn't explain All For One's clinginess, or the supposed care or concern or anything about All For One's long standing interest. The reasoning was too weak to be the whole story. All For One was at least a century over the human use by date, but that wasn't helping Izuku either without a similarly aged reference point.

"Because you looked like you needed one, little Izuku. To be told that it'll be alright."

In that exact moment, Izuku was struck by a sensation, like déjà vu that'd gone terribly wrong and veered off its assigned rails. Izuku tried to hold onto it and only then with some strain did everything connect. Last time he was in this situation, there was no supervillain captor to pat him on the back and reaffirm that he was special in spite of his flaws, only his sobbing mother and her apologies.

Izuku felt part of his world implode.

Katsuki didn't have the words to emote the shit they were doing. All of 1-A and 1-B were piled between sixty odd patients who'd volunteered for the students to practice basic medical tasks. Ponytail was chatting up Pain Numbing, Monoma was holding hands with Suspended Animation while she wept over her husbands recent death, Kirishima was spasming every time Electric Currents touched him and

Katsuki flexed a numbed arm after touching Paralysis.

At least he tried to. Katsuki's arm had fucking disappeared into the ether. He had a shoulder joint and that was it, all control was fucking gone. It hung there limply, like a noodle.

"Fuck man, you got no control over this?" Katsuki shook his shoulder and his arm flopped around limply.

Paralysis shook his head, his long bedraggled hair almost whipping Katsuki in the face. "No, if there is a way to turn it off I've never found it. I can only make it go further along the body."

Flicking his arm, Katsuki felt the twinge of pain. "Guess that fucking explains why you're here for pain management. This shit doesn't work on that all."

"Very inconvenient, it's why I wear gloves," the huge man grunted. Shame Shigaraki was too much of a dumb fuck to wear gloves. Even Round Face slept with mittens on to stop that shit playing up. Why the fuck Shigaraki never used anything to only cover one finger was out of Katsuki's grasp. Eh, he was terminally stupid anyway.

Come to think of it, who gives a fuck? He had to see what else a Paralysis Quirk could do while taking this guy's blood pressure. Hopefully everyone else wasn't going to fuck up their part of the plan.

Speaking of the plan, that was Kirishima's phone ringing. It was go time and Monoma better have his shit together for this one. Katsuki hadn't gone to all the effort of blowing up that bathroom just for them not to use it.

Neito was so glad he hadn't botched his part of the plan. Yet. That didn't mean he wasn't running out of time, crammed into an empty disabled bathroom with an Out Of Order sign precariously hanging off the front of it. The cleaners weren't scheduled until the next hour and hopefully it would stay that way. Them being early would be a disaster.

Hitoshi Shinsou was glaring holes through the back of his head while Neito tended to Kirishima who may or may not have been out cold. He definitely wasn't breathing. Neito had been left with the more confidential testing of the Suspended Animation Quirk and Bakugou was not going to be happy. Nor was Shinsou who probably thought

he'd been inadvertently drafted into a crime by Uraraka's teary askance for help. Neito hadn't seen her cry before… and he really didn't want to see it again.

"Are you going to tell me why I had to mimic the voice of Kirishima's mother?" Shinsou stated so bluntly that Neito could only wince at the lack of finesse. "And why is he so still?" A fidget with his mouthpiece.

"A Suspended Animation Quirk. You were his getaway excuse," Neito called over his shoulder as he manned the borrow stethoscope. No heart beat either and no breaths. No pulse. Monoma pricked Kirishima's finger with a lancet and no blood appeared either. Kirishima was clinically dead at the moment even if he didn't look it. That was very very bad. Neito touched Kirishima and he resumed breathing, as if nothing ever happened. His finger gleamed red.

"We good, Monoma?" Kirishima asked breezily, no different than before. Neito had the sense to forewarn Kirishima if he couldn't be reverted. In which case, they were all screwed anyway.

"We're good. Midoriya probably isn't," Neito frowned. "The lady whose Quirk I borrowed has a house full of preserved insects. All of them are still technically living, but are under the influence of her Quirk."

"How exactly is that a problem? Why is Midoriya not good?" Shinsou was glancing between them and Neito resisted the urge to say something unpleasant. Midoriya had some respect for Shinsou and maybe after a proper introduction, Neito would too.

Instead, he took a deep breath. "All Might has asked us to investigate a number of Quirk types that were recently stolen. He suspects that All For One, the villain who flattened Kamino, is holding him captive. We can't tell anyone outside in case it gets back to said villain in question."

"Suspended Animation is one of the Quirks then," Shinsou nodded with wide eyes. Ah, there was the panic. No one else had seemed that concerned… apart from Mineta, but Mineta was the sort who seemed to grasp exactly what sort of outcome usually awaited people like Midoriya. Permanent disability was one of the nicer outcomes. Mineta cried over the rest.

"Yes, along with Pain Numbing, Paralysis and Electrical Currents. They're not the exact same specific Quirks he took, but normally Quirks with the same typings have similar characteristics. We're trying

to work out exactly what All For One would be doing with these Quirks." Monoma gestured grandly around their temporary and filthy base of operations. Leaving sooner would be better than later. "The problem with Suspended Animation is that this flavour of the Quirk has held insects in suspension for well over sixty years."

"Oh shit," Kirishima whispered and Neito winced.

"Why is that an issue?" Shinsou asked Kirishima.

"All For One's like over a hundred, maybe even two or three hundred. He's got a longevity Quirk and a bunch of others which means he and Midoriya can just outlive everyone if Midoriya's in suspension," Kirishima explained around his finger, which had been unceremoniously jammed into his mouth.

"The other bad thing is that if what All For One obtained is in any way similar to this Quirk, then Midoriya being clinically dead might not matter. He freezes him until he can find a suitable healing Quirk." Then Midoriya wakes up three hundred years old with only that psychopath for company. Bakugou was going to kill someone when he heard about what these Quirks did. Electrical Currents wasn't any better. "Normally those properties don't matter because the Quirk will fade with lifespan of the wielder. It's not the case for All For One. He'll keep on going well after the rest of us are dead."

"Then unfreezes him as if nothing ever happened…" Shinsou fell into a crouch. "The news said Midoriya was missing."

"That's technically the truth. He's missing, but we know who has him and we think we know why," Neito nodded. "With your mimicry gear we can skirt some of our scheduling arrangements to do further investigations."

"When I agreed to to help it was mainly curiosity… but this…" Shinsou waved a hand. "I'm not even in the Heroics course."

"Who cares?" Kirishima groaned from the bathroom wall. "Rumours are you'll be in there sometime soon."

"Only if I pass the exam," Shinsou shook his head. "I figured you all might be… upset if Eraserhead gives me Midoriya's place in 1-A," Shinsou almost cautiously broached and Neito had enough dignity not to snort. "Bakugou in particular seems to be sensitive."

"Everyone is sensitive about the issue, but who knows if Midoriya's

even going to be in a position to rejoin the class? Months with a mass murderer isn't going to help his grades." Neito had been told about the Noumu. Shinsou didn't deserve that much horror in what was their first proper meeting. Uraraka had set this up, after all. He would have to be eased into their plan.

"You're not worried about my Quirk?"

Brainwashing… Why ever would Neito or anyone else be worried about that? It just meant that Shinsou needed a hand with any schemes, much like Neito himself.

"Nah, Monoma's in the same boat. We're cool." Kirishima got to it before Neito could, which was a relief. "We should get the signal any time now…"

Neito waited.

"YOU MOTHERFUCKER!" Bakugou's dulcet tones echoed through the walls.

There it was.

"Cleaner's coming, time to go."

"You are extremely strange people."

"You get used to it."

Chapter End Notes

> My medication is screwing with my vision yet again, but here we go.

Discovery

Chapter Summary

Knowledge isn't comfort.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku Midoriya was no Tomura Shigaraki. The doctor watched the odd pairing hobble down the hallway, one slow step between each sharp barb between them. Midoriya was hanging onto his IV pole for dear life while Sensei had an arm wrapped around him on the other side. Midoriya was distinctly favouring the IV pole.

“I still don’t know,” Midoriya said between gasps of air, “what possessed you to take on All Might in his own field.” It was all the doctor could do to carry on and not allow his jaw to crash to the floor. “I don’t know what you were trying to prove, but it didn’t work,” the boy gasped.

The doctor made a stringent attempt to appear busy and distracted as they passed him without a glance.

“Isn’t it obvious?” Sensei answered while Midoriya took another step.

“No, because you should have worked it out when you lost the first time,” Midoriya wheezed and the doctor felt his heart notably stall.

Sensei chuckled. “My harshest critic.”

Midoriya was shaking his head. “You stopped to taunt him the first time, didn’t you?” Midoriya was asking between breaths. The doctor felt the air grow denser.

“What gave you that impression?” The doctor would have mistaken it for offence if Sensei’s voice didn’t wobble as he spoke.

“All of Kamino,” Midoriya sighed. “You’re meant to brag after you win, you know.” Matter of fact and tired, it didn’t sound like something new. An old argument they’d had before, perhaps?

“But I did win.”

“He beat you so badly he thought he killed you for six years.”

“That’s his mistake then.”

“You’re the one who wanted one last dig and gave him that opening,” Midoriya tiredly fired back. How did Midoriya even know what happened? It was never made public anywhere. Sensei certainly never discussed it. Not with any of them.

“Why do we always have this discussion?” Sensei sighed theatrically.

“You never answer simple ques-” Midoriya wheezed and fell straight into Sensei’s waiting arms. If that had been Shigaraki, Sensei no doubt would have been a second too late catching him.

“Time for a break, I think.” Nor would there have been any breaks with Shigaraki.

“Just a short one,” Midoriya was insisting, struggling in Sensei’s leisurely grip. Together, they both sank into seats at the midway point in the edge of the doctor’s eye.

“What’s your problem with All Might anyway?” Midoriya was still partially slouched against Sensei, grimacing the whole time.

“I thought that was obvious,” Sensei drawled, an arm pinning Midoriya to him. Midoriya glared back at Sensei.

“How is he any different to anyone else who’s tried to kill you?” Midoriya paused for a moment. “Apart from him temporarily succeeding,” was then added, almost as an afterthought. “You seemed to have a problem with him even before that happened.”

“How would you know about that?” That was an excellent question. How did Midoriya know anything about this? He was nine when Sensei was maimed by All Might.

“All Might’s debut… it was you, wasn’t it? You were the reason he had to rescue all those people. You blew up the buildings so he was distracted and you could escape,” Midoriya was nodding and the doctor felt time stand still. “It happened more than once. An unknown villain attack, lots of damage and time consuming rescues… but they never named you.” All of a sudden, it was very very cold in the hallway. “It’s a pattern.” And Midoriya was quite skilled at spotting patterns, wasn’t he? How interesting. How observant.

“You seem certain it was me.” Sensei’s lack of invitation did little to deter Midoriya. Little Quirkless Midoriya who never seemed particularly bothered or surprised by anything Sensei did, unless it involved physical contact. Then the boy flinched and the doctor had his theories of course, and Sensei wasn’t particularly overjoyed with any of those conclusions. In fact, Sensei was quite temperamental about those conclusions.

“All Might was bleeding from the head in his debut,” Midoriya pointed out. “That almost never happened… unless it was with the unknown villain.” He seemed to hesitate for a moment than continued. “It was just like Kamino.”

Sensei paused. Then he laughed. “You’re identifying me based on my wounding patterns now?”

“It was you, then,” Midoriya bobbed his head in triumph and Sensei’s hand ran through it. Midoriya shuddered. Shigaraki had never seemed bothered by contact, but Midoriya clearly wasn’t the same.

“Yes, it was me. Little point in attempting to hide when I’ve already been caught,” Sensei confirmed.

“So why…” Midoriya twitched his head.

“Why him over the others?” After a moment of consideration, Sensei continued. “How does anyone tolerate a living lie? All Might’s little Symbol of Peace stunt was only ever going to last as long as he did. He lived a lie long after his use by date as well.” The old problem. All Might wasn’t a long term solution to societal discord, as Sensei had pointed out numerous times. The moment his time passed, the crime rate would skyrocket. A temporary solution at best. A poor solution at best.

Midoriya blinked, then after a few seconds inclined his head. “Aren’t you the same, though?” The doctor almost choked on his own tongue and saw Sensei’s hand turn Midoriya’s head to look at him. What Sensei was trying to find, the doctor didn’t know.

“You think that I’m living a lie?” Sensei asked. Cautious.

Midoriya nodded. “You never sound happy about what you do,” the boy said simply. “You maimed All Might… but you don’t sound happy talking about it. Angry, vindictive, but not happy.” Midoriya was taking his time, face set into a frown. “Which… makes sense, I think, because All Might liked every part of his job… unless you or

paperwork came up." The boy knew All Might that well? How closely had he been planted? Presumably that's what he was, to match his green colour. It would be within Sensei's type of humour. "He wasn't happy about having to deal with you."

Sensei exhaled sharply. "If you weren't told about me, then why did he entrust you with his backstory?" Why was the backstory of All Might even significant? He was a thorn with a grudge, nothing more. So why was this an important point in the conversation?

"To help people," Midoriya enunciated, as if he was speaking to a child. As if Midoriya was the one with over a century of life experience, not Sensei. "The whole world doesn't revolve around you." Then, so quietly the doctor almost missed it in a clutter of paper. "You're as bad as Kacchan."

"Did you just compare me to Katsuki Bakugou?" Sensei recoiled as if Midoriya had burned him. The doctor would have cracked a smile if it wasn't certain death.

"Stop behaving like him then," came zipping straight back. "Not everything is about you."

"First a comparison to All Might, now one to Bakugou. You wound me, Izuku." The doctor couldn't risk a glance to see Sensei's body language, but something about the tone of his voice made the doctor's hair stand up on the back of his neck.

"You don't like what you do and you don't like Kacchan who Shigaraki was after." Midoriya took a deep breath. "So why do you keep doing it if you don't want to be here?" That was another excellent question. Midoriya was full of excellent questions. Questions which he shouldn't have been able to ask in the first place.

"You act as though I have a choice in the matter." The doctor saw a bead of water splatter on the page in front of him and cringed. Fortunately, neither of the pair with their supernatural hearing turned an eye to him.

"What's stopping you?" Midoriya was pushing and Sensei was frowning.

"All Might." Sensei waved a hand dismissively.

"That's not all of it." Midoriya was wriggling away as best as he could, but Sensei still had him trapped. "Even when All Might thought you

were dead you didn't try to leave. You made the Noumu instead, why?" The doctor attempted not to bristle at his lack of noted involvement. The children were not a single person effort by any means. "You could have bowed out, your name isn't known." The doctor held his breath.

"But the memories of me didn't fade from him or his associates. They spent years hunting for me long after my supposed death," Sensei hissed. "So much time lost." Things would have proceeded much smoother with Sensei's involvement at an earlier point in time, but Sensei had never taken that initiative. No matter how many times it was raised he'd always refused, hunting for a solution to his injuries from the shadows. "I never had an option." Then why hadn't Sensei simply said that in the first place?

"That's not true. You had the option… but something made you choose against it." The doctor was sure he and Midoriya both had the exact same expression of dawning realisation. "This is about what you're guarding, isn't it?" Fumbling, the doctor attempted not to drop the beakers he was marking at the trolley. Sensei was guarding something… That was news to him.

"You seem awfully fixated on that idea." Not an encouraging response.

"Because I'm right… I just need more for confirmation," the boy insisted and the doctor had to stop himself from staring at a child who was provoking Sensei without a single drop of fear behind it. No conception of his impending demise. "Then again, it might be too late." Midoriya was whispering to himself.

"Oh? Why would going back be too late now?" Sensei dragged Midoriya closer. "You've changed your mind?"

"Does…" Midoriya swallowed. "Does whatever you're guarding… know… what you've done?" Midoriya whispered and the doctor skidded to the halt in the middle of putting a bottle away. The real question was a question of complicity. Was there another person of interest that Sensei hadn't told anyone about?

"No," All For One said softly and the doctor almost dropped the bottle. Who? Who was it? Why didn't they know? Who was Sensei hiding?

Midoriya groaned. "You know how they're going to react, don't you?"

"Much the same way you did," Sensei flippantly replied and Midoriya

bristled like a hedgehog. Sensei was hiding someone… and they most likely didn't even know it.

"I don't think you understand how people feel about what you've done," Midoriya said slowly. "If you did that to one person, then you're capable of doing that to them. You're a threat, especially with your history." A history Midoriya was somehow familiar with.

"I wasn't," Sensei murmured, "not back then. I never chose to be the the villain in this story."

"*Oh!*" Midoriya perked up, beaming. "*That's* why you never sound happy about what you do."

The doctor sympathised with Sensei's long suffering sigh, he really did. "Can I say anything to you without you reading into it?"

"No." Midoriya was shameless. And fearless. "Who took it away from you?" Midoriya had inserted an arm between Sensei and himself and was doing his best to crowbar the older man's arm off him. Not to much avail, but him trying it in the first place was unsettling.

"People like All Might did," Sensei muttered.

"That doesn't answer my full question." If Midoriya survived this encounter, the doctor wasn't sure how he was going to treat the boy after the fact.

"You can't help yourself, can you?" Sensei rested a hand on Midoriya's head and the doctor felt time slow again. This was it…

Midoriya winced. "No… I don't think I made friends at school because of it."

Sensei's hand sank into the boy's hair, disappearing into green curls. "You deserve so much better," he sighed. And the window was gone. Sensei was lingering longer than he should have, nestled as he was against Midoriya.

Midoriya didn't reply. He seemed to have been distracted staring at his hand with the drip into it, as if the prospect of what was happening had broken some part of his brain.

"But I suppose we should at least make it back the back we came."

And it started again, as if their break hadn't happened.

“Air pressure… why didn’t you add a fire Quirk to it and make it a flamethrower? He isn’t immune to fire, you know.”

“What is it with you and setting things on fire? You know precisely why I can’t.”

“What does it have to do with me? You set Kamino on fire, remember? And you already picked a fight with All Might so why not…” Then the two trailed off up around the corner.

Only then did the doctor allow himself to slump onto the trolley and mop at his sweating brow. Midoriya should be dead. Anyone else *would* be dead. The brazenness, the sheer disrespect. Whatever link Midoriya had to Sensei wasn’t what the same as what Sensei had with Shigaraki. Midoriya was being rewarded for his snide observations, even if he didn’t realise it. A child with no grasp of physical contact, who didn’t realise what it meant.

No, Izuku Midoriya was no Tomura Shigaraki. Never had Shigaraki been so cutthroat towards his Sensei. Never had Shigaraki been treated as though he were in any way equal. Midoriya wasn’t a mere pawn. With the way Sensei had reshuffled the board to preserve Midoriya, there were the markings of a king or queen that Sensei was moving away from obliteration. The question remained though… why had Sensei left such an important piece on the other side?

Unless, perhaps, Midoriya was no piece at all, but another hand at the board.

Kurogiri didn’t have enough dread left in him for Yagi’s visits. There wasn’t enough energy left for that man. Not with the constant restraints and the gruel he was fed according to Tartarus prison warden standards. What felt like months of drilling had ruined the smell of coffee for him for an indefinite period. Then, as though his thoughts had summoned him, the door bounced off the wall with a clang as Yagi marched in, a tray of nine coffees held on a tray. Nine. Kurogiri held back a whimper.

Most notably was his lack of a partner in crime. Tsukauchi who seemed to be as pained by Yagi’s antics as Kurogiri himself. That didn’t stop Yagi from slamming shut the door and dropping into his normal seat between Kurogiri and the door.

“No Tsukauchi today?” Kurogiri coldly asked. Tsukauchi who at least behaved like a standard detective and not Yagi, who crawled out of a CIA black site to ply his trades elsewhere. If it wasn’t for his accent, Kurogiri would have pegged Yagi for a tried and true American.

“He’s caught in traffic, something about a seven car pileup,” Yagi waved a hand. “He’ll be with us shortly.”

Provided there was any traffic and Tsukauchi wasn’t already here somewhere. “I doubt that.”

“You would say that, being a warper,” Yagi snorted. “Have you ever seen the expressways?” Yagi let out a low whistle. “I sometimes wonder if the designer for the Tokyo Expressway was someone working for your boss, because that right there-” Yagi waved a biscuit “-is the work of a real sadist. Be thankful you’ve never had to drive in it.” Only… Kurogiri had driven in it, what felt like a lifetime ago.

Kurogiri rolled his eyes. “Sensei would never demean himself to those levels.”

“You wanna bet?” Yagi gestured. “I think him going after Izuku Midoriya was a pretty low and petty thing for him to demean himself with.”

Kurogiri’s breath froze in his lungs. Izuku Midoriya… What did Izuku Midoriya have to do with anything? Kurogiri had been instructed to keep Tomura Shigaraki away from the UA student. Why would Sensei be directly involved? He had only wanted information on the student. There were no signs of anything untoward.

Instead, he took deep breaths. “I’m unaware of what you could be referring to.”

“Midoriya’s murder,” Yagi said so bluntly and so darkly that a crushing weight ripped the air from Kurogiri’s lungs.

“What?” Kurogiri wheezed with no air to draw in. Instead there was just pain.

“Your Sensei dropped a skyscraper on him,” Yagi drawled from around a cup of coffee. “Fifteen year old that never hurt a fly. And your Sensei killed him.” Kurogiri couldn’t… get… air… “Just standing there minding his own business and a building comes flying at him. Sounds petty to me.”

“Why?” Kurogiri gasped. It didn’t make sense. Sensei hadn’t indicated he wanted the boy’s death. He was curious, not hostile.

“You tell me, Kurogiri. You work for him. Why would he want a teenager dead? Did Midoriya sneeze in his cereal?” Yagi was leaning forwards, watching Kurogiri struggle with total indifference. “I’m only here because of Midoriya. His case landed on my table, so tell me Kurogiri - why did All For One want him dead?”

To answer, or not to answer? Unlike previous times, there was no release. Yagi’s face hadn’t lost it’s edge, there was no Tsukauchi to hold him back and Kurogiri… couldn’t… breathe! Tsukauchi must have been stuck in traffic. Why was he letting this happen? Where were the others? Why weren’t they helping?

Tick tock. Too long without air. No one was coming. No one would come, if Sensei hadn’t already. Sensei who was so ill, so much lost from what he once was. Surely it wasn’t that important? Wasn't when the boy was already dead?

“Fine,” Kurogiri hissed with what was left and the weight lifted. And the pressure was gone, he slumped into his restraints inhaling as deeply as he dared. Yagi allowed him to just breathe for a few moments.

“You have to understand Kurogiri, that I’m not here because I want to ride your ass,” Yagi explained. “We’re here because a mother doesn’t understand where her son went and why he’s never coming home again.” Flexing his fingers, there was an underlying menace to Yagi that sent chills down Kurogiri’s spine and lungs. “So what happened?” Yagi pushed forwards an untouched cup of coffee and Kurogiri eyed it.

A peace offering? Was it really as simple as giving away what he knew of the boy? Something that was, all things considered, not that much. Nothing vital to Sensei’s operations, more like a curiosity. A dead curiosity.

Nodding slowly, Kurogiri spoke. “He was *curious* about Izuku Midoriya.”

“Only curious?” Yagi asked, lifting the cup to Kurogiri’s mouth for a sip. It was warm… and didn’t taste like gruel. There were probably four sugars in it. Yagi had a sweet tooth. How unlike the person drinking it. “What do you mean?”

“He said that the boy developed a Quirk,” Kurogiri explained after

another searing mouthful. “Children… don’t typically develop Quirks without outside influence.”

“Not without your Sensei’s help, you mean,” Yagi was nodding, his features set. All Might knew who Sensei was, it made sense that knowledge of his Quirk would have been passed to the police. The secret was out.

“I-I don’t know,” Kurogiri shuddered, half expecting the crushing sensation, but it never appeared. “He wanted everything that could be found on the boy. School records, friends, movements, any known involvement in operations, information on his Quirk’s registration. He watched UA’s Sports Festival to see for himself…” Sensei, in hindsight, was almost obsessive in regards to Izuku Midoriya. “He wanted to know why the boy’s Quirk kept damaging him.”

There was something deeply unsettling about the feral expression on Yagi’s face. The way his lips peeled back to expose teeth in a feral snarl of an expression. Something that prompted Kurogiri to keep going. “He never wanted anything about Izuku Midoriya’s parents though,” Kurogiri tacked on, almost in desperation. “There were no indications that…” That Sensei was going to drop a building on a child, but Kurogiri had the impression that saying such a thing to Yagi would be unwise.

“And you expect me to think he had wholesome reasons for wanting this information?” Yagi bit out. “The kid is dead.”

Kurogiri helplessly shrugged. “I-I was told to keep an eye on Tomura Shigaraki’s interest in Izuku Midoriya and…” It was make or break to give away this tidbit of information. “To keep Tomura Shigaraki away from the boy.”

Yagi settled back in his chair, his frown deepening. “So, what? He was trying to shield the kid?”

“I was told not to discuss anything I learned about the boy with Tomura Shigaraki,” Kurogiri confessed. Was Sensei shielding Izuku Midoriya? He didn’t know. No one really knew the inner thoughts of Sensei apart from Sensei himself.

“Then why is he dead? Turns out Shigaraki wasn’t the main threat to Midoriya after all.” No… no he wasn’t. Why indeed. Sensei had never displayed ill will of any sort towards Izuku Midoriya. An information hoarding obsession yes, but not hostility. It was secretive to say the least.

“I think… it may have been accident,” Kurogiri whispered. “There were never any plans or signs that he was targeting the boy. Nothing.” Absolutely nothing that Kurogiri could divine from Sensei’s limited response. Sensei hadn’t gone out of his way to not allow Tomura Shigaraki to execute his plans near Izuku Midoriya, but the latter seemed to be able to take care of himself to some extent.

“But he knew about him as far back as the USJ incident, didn’t he?” Yagi prodded. Yagi, straight faced, narrowed eyes… It made Kurogiri’s skin crawl.

Kurogiri nodded, feeling lost. “He recognised him.”

“Did he now?” Yagi’s eye’s widened just a miniscule. “How would he even know about such a plain kid?”

Kurogiri shrugged. “I don’t know anything else.” At least not about Izuku Midoriya. The mystery who held Sensei’s attention.

“Not my problem,” Yagi grunted, “I’m only here for Midoriya’s matter. Whatever else you’ve done is someone else’s problem. You scratch my back and I’m out of your misty hair.”

Kurogiri had to stop himself from crying with relief. Anything to get rid of Yagi. Anything.

Momo didn’t want to say it. 1-A was full of bright students and even the least studious student could see the writing on the wall. No one really wanted to say it, but even Ida agreed that there was only one sane conclusion to come to with this information.

Izuku Midoriya was still alive. Being alive didn’t mean he was technically living though, not in the common meaning sense of the word. What condition he was in was beyond what they had for exact speculation, but as a collective they could hazard a guess. It wasn’t a guess any of them wanted to spend a prolonged period dwelling on, but it was a guess nonetheless. A guess Bakugou was taking particularly poorly.

Pain Numbing was obvious, it would have stripped alarming sensations from Midoriya. Sensations that would have made him aware that something was wrong with his state of being. And, if there was no pain medications being given, Midoriya would have no reason to believe than any major problems were still in effect if he woke up

after… after what happened. He would be totally oblivious to his pain receptors screaming at him. Shock was also a substantial reason for death, but if pain could be staved off then so could part of the injury. Namely the ensuing panic from the patient's realisation that they had the injury. With the severity of Midoriya's injuries, such a Quirk was almost a requirement if All For One wanted him to survive the initial impact. An impact Momo predicted.

Paralysis went hand in hand with Pain Numbing. Midoriya could be subdued and operated on without any ability to resist and no conception of any alterations made to him in surgery. It was a logical and perhaps necessary choice if All For One was avoiding the risks associated with conventional anaesthetics. If Midoriya was already close to clinically dead, then it was another factor that could be mitigated with suitable Quirk usage. It was also a restraint itself, given the destructiveness of Midoriya's Quirk. Midoriya helpless, unable to move, subdued by the stolen Quirk of a monster… Momo shook herself from the imagery.

Electrical Currents was an unusual choice at first glance, but control of nerves gave All For One control of a person. Nerves themselves were chemical receptors with currents passing through them. With enough time it was possible to puppeteer people and All For One had nothing but time, if Bakugou wasn't fibbing about the villain's age. Midoriya would have no understanding that he was still injured and no ability to resist his strings being pulled. Between Pain Numbing, Paralysis and Electrical Currents, it would be simple for All For One to restrain Midoriya without use of chemical restraints. He would be aware of everything, though how much would be muddied by brain damage was a guess at best.

Suspended Animation by far was the most concerning. Kirishima and Monoma had both reported back that all biological functions halted and went into hibernation from the type of Quirk they had tested. If what All For One had taken was in any way similar, they might be waiting decades before so much as a clue as to Midoriya's whereabouts resurfaced. Or, they might have all passed away with old age before a whisper of him was heard. Even if All For One wasn't limited by time, Midoriya was now in that same category if that Quirk was in operation. Both of them untouched by time or decay. Midoriya trapped, completely unaware of the outside world until he was needed for whatever depraved ideas lurked in All For One's mind.

Midoriya, who was like that because *she* let them use her tracker. Bakugou at least been retrieved whole, while not necessarily happy.

There was no guarantee that even if Midoriya was retrieved that he wasn't going to be reduced to the same state as All For One's other victims, the Noumu. Shells to be wielded against his enemies. Entities with only the vaguest comparisons to a normal human. Midoriya wouldn't be Midoriya anymore, but they couldn't just leave him. He didn't deserve that, no one did.

None of them could come up with a better reason for why someone like Midoriya had been taken. Midoriya who was a shy, but enthusiastic boy when it came to Quirks and his studies. Midoriya whose Quirk was capable of destroying mountains. A Quirk created by All For One. A Quirk that would surely be appealing to someone who weaponised people as puppets and who would no doubt want it back in some capacity.

Bakugou, unsurprisingly, had taken their conclusions the worst out of all of them. Bakugou's only, nearly incoherent, response had been "I called him a puppet" then he fled from the room. Who could blame him? Uraraka was pale and shaking, the cruel irony of Bakugou's nickname eating into her as much as it did him.

It wasn't something Momo wanted to dwell on, but they all dwelled on it. There wasn't any sleep and even with school resuming, Momo was almost certain that their results were being scaled to account for what happened. That they all hadn't been expelled had been a shock to everyone, but the teachers too had no words for what happened. It was just something that happened… and left a Midoriya sized hole in the year group. The teachers still called his name on the role, whether it was out of habit or because he hadn't been officially declared dead wasn't something they were brave enough to ask about.

For all of that though, Momo still had other things to worry about. An old problem and a recently materialised problem, the latter which had breached her mansion's security and leapt through a nearby open window.

"Sorry." A soot covered Todoroki was panting, face down on the carpet, cooling himself off with his own ice, not at all bothered by the newly generated spear pointing at his throat when he lifted his head. "The old man was right behind me, I didn't have time for the intercom."

Momo set her spear down and helped the charred Todoroki off the ground. "Endeavor is really set on finding you, isn't he?" Todoroki's position wasn't an enviable one. Word had spread about the less than

warm relationship between father and son, to the point where Todoroki was couch surfing from house to house in an attempt to avoid him. Not that any one period lasted when his father was hunting him as though he were a hardened criminal.

“He worked out I was at Midoriya’s house from the press.” Todoroki gasped. “I bailed so he wouldn’t go after her.” That in and of itself came back to the first issue - how to take care of Inko Midoriya when the woman was so frayed after her son’s disappearance. If Todoroki wasn’t able to do it, then someone else would have to be found to help and Momo’s list was frightfully short after Bakugou’s latest round of revelations. It was, naturally, an ongoing problem that had to be overcome in a more tactful manner.

“Are you sure none of your siblings can help you?” Momo asked, leading Todoroki to a plush armchair which he fell into.

“No, only my brother's really moved out and no one’s heard from him lately.” Todoroki shook his head. “Not that we blame him. The old man did a number on him and he wanted out before mum was hospitalised,” he finished lamely. That ruled out Todoroki hiding out with another estranged family member.

“How many of our classmates have offered to help?” All of them agreeing was probable, but Bakugou wasn’t able to with the hostile nature of his home conditions. He was quite blunt in his assertions that nobody who stayed over at his house would be sleeping well in it, if they slept at all. His mother was apparently quite noisy and nosey.

“Just about all of them, but that means the old man will be clued in and send his agency on patrol around those houses. They might be pros, but they don’t know what’s been happening behind the scenes.” Todoroki sunk into the seat, an expression of bliss on his face.

Momo had an idea. “You can stay here. We have plenty of room, but I need your help with something.” Momo resisted the urge to wring her hands.

Todoroki blinked. “Can’t be worse than my old man.”

Momo nodded enthusiastically. “Can you think of anyone able to take care of Midoriya’s mother?”

“What about Bakugou?” Todoroki said so abruptly that Momo skipped a step.

“Bakugou?” Momo repeated. Bakugou did know Inko Midoriya well from his youth. That wasn’t her main concern about Bakugou being shortlisted.

“He said his parents are being a pain, just like mine,” Todoroki sighed. “They can’t kick up a fuss the same way my old man can, either. Bakugou Senior might be a designer, but he hasn’t got an agency to stalk his son with.” When Todoroki put it like that…

“Is Bakugou…” Momo frowned and tried to word it correctly. “Is Bakugou going to be able to handle being in Midoriya’s house? He’s been the most upset by what happened.” An understatement. Bakugou was beyond consoling.

“He seems okay when he visits with Monoma and Kirishima. Ripped through the cleaning like it wasn’t there and he can cook if he wears gloves.” Todoroki shrugged. “I was expecting to have to call the fire brigade, but he handled dinner without incident.”

“He can run the household?” Momo confirmed. If Inko Midoriya couldn’t take care of herself, then a little more experience was going to be needed.

“I think he can, Kirishima and Monoma will back me up on it.” Todoroki paused. “The hard part will be convincing him, but I think he’ll appreciate having a break from his folks.”

That was… almost too easy. Momo knew the Bakugou family were relatively well off, certainly better off than Inko Midoriya, but there was a shadow to Todoroki’s face when he spoke of them that mirrored the one he wore when discussing his father. It wasn’t a pleasant or happy expression. It was cold.

“Right, that’s sorted then.” Momo hesitated a smile. One tiny piece of stress alleviated, for the moment. “I’ll let my parents know you’re staying.”

Todoroki made a noise of appreciation and Momo made her way to where her mother was sitting. They weren’t going to say no, they were always thrilled to have guests over. It wouldn’t bother them that Todoroki was a boy when they heard why he was staying… and gave him a room at the opposite end of the house to Momo. “Mother! I have a guest, he might need to stay here for a little while because his family is having difficulties.”

Momo tried not to think about the huge crate of dolls she’d hidden in

one of the many walk in wardrobes in the mansion. Her parents were stressed enough without one of them making that discovery. That was a problem for after Inko Midoriya was capable of taking care of herself again.

Naomasa leapt three feet into the air when All Might's front door slammed open and slammed shut. Bakugou beside him merely grunted. Maybe that was normal for him. As normal as it was for All Might to recruit a high school student to conduct some questionable investigations that he wasn't willing to entrust to the police.

Toshinori Yagi came stomping in, a folder clenched in a bone white hand. "We have a very large problem." Yagi, as was today's guise, sounded like he was about to shatter into a million pieces. Yagi who was All Might, Yagi who was distraught. Yagi who tossed the stuffed folder onto the table with a dense thud and hurled himself into a seat. Strangely enough… there were five seats at the table. Was Yagi expecting other guests?

"What the fuck did Misty say?" Bakugou was already at the kettle, hefting it to the sink.

"All For One somehow knew young Midoriya before he was a UA student," Yagi whispered, his head in his hands. "How could that even happen?"

Naomasa heard a clang of Bakugou dropping the kettle.

"What the fuck." Bakugou was staring at Yagi. "How the fucking hell would he know Deku before UA?" Bakugou lifted the kettle again and set it back in its plate.

Naomasa blinked slowly. "How?" Midoriya didn't even have a known link with All Might prior to UA did he? Naomasa would have heard beforehand if that was the case.

"That's what we need to find out. Kurogiri said that he recognised young Midoriya from the USJ attack." Yagi was trembling and collapsed even further into the seat opposite Naomasa. "And once he did recognise him, he tore through every single information source he had to profile Midoriya. School records, current and past, movements, names of friends and associates, teachers, his Quirk, *everything*. He wanted his life story, by all indications."

It was never a pleasant feeling to realise that the mass murderer you were after was also a stalker. Nobody pulled that much information on someone without some serious underlying problems or obsession. Naomasa had witnessed the usual forms of adults stalking each other, but for an adult to fixate on a child… For All For One to be fixated on a kid, even before the kid was seen in public, had some sickening connotations. Had he stolen the boy's Quirk? Naomasa almost wished he had, because was the nicest explanation he was currently willing to think about while he being served tea by the boy's childhood friend.

"That's not all," Yagi was trembling. "He sent someone after the formal name of young Midoriya's Quirk…"

Naomasa felt a slow boil in his stomach. It wasn't just any random person who had access to those records… "It was a UA teacher who told All For One, wasn't it?" Just like they'd suspected beforehand, but having it just about confirmed by someone as close to the head of the operation as Kurogiri was disturbing. Kurogiri had no idea just how much information he gave away, if Yagi had followed the plan and Tsukauchi was indefinitely "caught in traffic".

Bakugou answered first. "Deku never said shit about the name of his Quirk to us, not even me. Said it was an enhancer type and left it at that. Had to be a fucking teacher when none of us know what it's called. He didn't like talking about it, which was fucking weird from him."

Yagi was nodding vigorously. "It's a very short list of teachers who would have access to that information. And there's only two names that come to mind who would have any reason to know what it was." Two names they'd discussed on prior occasions. Well, in reality it was only one name. The first name raised was laughable.

"It's not fucking Eraserhead. He's too busy taking a fucking nap to sneak out and deal with villains after working two full time jobs." Arms crossed and unmovable, Naomasa didn't think it'd be wise to attempt to convince the unstable teenager otherwise. Not that there was a need to either.

"Correct. He has many alibis covering him." Yagi folded his arms on the table. "We really only have one suspect who was in a position to perform the trifecta of leaks. Step one: they obtained a teacher schedule that told them that I would be present at the USJ for exercises."

“Only a schedule, do you think?” Naomasa raised. “They didn’t have more?” It didn’t seem like it from the poor quality of All For One’s cannon fodder. Cheap and tacky, there to boost numbers and act as a distraction. They had no knowledge of what they were up against.

“Nope, they didn’t know shit about what Quirks we had either. They dumped Froggy into a fucking water area. Look at how well that went.” Bakugou jerked his head and grinned without humour. “Eraserhead could have told those chucklefucks that All Might was late as well, but they had no fucking idea why he wasn’t there. Whoever it was that took it also needed a distraction to peep a look at the schedule too. Remember the fuckwit Shigaraki breaking down the front door?”

Bakugou had a... delicate way with words, but all were valid points and Naomasa nodded approvingly. Eraserhead knew the Quirks of 1-A and had access to the teaching schedule by default. The students in 1-A likewise knew the Quirks of their cohort from the day one testing, which ruled them out. Eraserhead also wouldn’t have needed Shigaraki to decay the front door and infest the campus grounds with journalists to acquire that information. Automatically, suspicion had then defaulted to 1-B’s class and teacher.

“All good points, young Bakugou. Step two: they notified All For One about young Midoriya’s profile. Though from what Kurogiri disclosed, it wasn’t enough. All For One wanted more.” Yagi’s frown would have made a passing villain faint from the intensity. “The teacher who gave him that information had no direct contact with Midoriya that we know of. All information was indirect or secondhand. This didn’t exactly please All For One.”

“All For One a fucking stalker… Is that new or what?” Bakugou was aggressively stirring his tea. Everything about Bakugou was aggressive, Naomasa had discovered, but it was coloured with frustration more than any real malice. An inability to handle what was happening around him, but that went for just about everyone involved with this case whether they showed it or not. Why it had to happen to someone so young made Naomasa grimace.

“It’s news to me. All For One’s usual habit was to find them, pop out of a nearby bin, obliterate them and disappear again.” Yagi was shaking again. “He never… never kept people. Just killed them.” A fact that was making All For One’s fixation on Midoriya all the more concerning. What made Midoriya so different than even his corpse was worth more than his front organisation?

With the way Bakugou's face scrunched up, he was drawing the same conclusions as the rest of them. "That prick wasn't violent with Deku either, held him pretty gently."

"All For One's a mystery, but him expressing anything close to care or interest alone is a red flag." Flipping the folder open, Yagi stopped on Bakugou's statement of the day Midoriya died. "If Midoriya is by some miracle alive, it's because All For One wants him for something."

"Something more important than fucking Shigaraki."

"Something that had him sacrifice his main warper," Naomasa added.

"It's not going to be anything good." Yagi's face was twitching. None of them wanted to think about it. "Moving on to step three: the camp. Only two teachers and senior admin were aware of it's location," Yagi sighed and Naomasa knew what was coming before Bakugou had even thought about opening his mouth. "That's without mentioning that our suspect was very interested in the Quirks and Quirk names of 1-A even after the public showing at the Sports Festival. Eraserhead didn't find it odd at the time, but he certainly did after the fact when he remembered there was obligatory staff attendance at the Sports Festival for supervision purposes." Flipping through, Yagi opened the folder to another page with a diagram of a stadium. "What purpose was there in asking about 1-A's Quirks when they were already public?"

"It was that fucking asshole from 1-B, Vlad King, wasn't it?" Bakugou's teaspoon was visibly bending. Naomasa didn't even bother feigning surprise. "Vlad King was sweating like a fucking pig at that press conference and it wasn't even his student who got taken," Bakugou added. "I was watching you know. Eraserhead's calm as a cucumber and King's shitting bricks for some reason. Guess we know why, now, that fucking prick." Bakugou hands were fizzing and Yagi patted him on the shoulder, immediately extinguishing them.

"Yes, young Bakugou, Vlad King, the homeroom teacher of 1-B is our main suspect. He had access to the schedules, had limited access to information pertaining to young Midoriya and had the camp location…" Yagi cracked a smile that Naomasa was more used to seeing at the police station when Yagi was in character. "Given what's happened as a result of your kidnapping, young Bakugou, Kurogiri at least seemed certain that those involved in the lead up to Midoriya's death would be experiencing All For One's displeasure."

“That fucking important, huh?” Bakugou was slouching in his seat. “King killed a fucking student, right? When are we arresting the prick?”

“We need to do it carefully, or he’ll bail on us and we’ll lose our opportunity to find out what exactly he was telling All For One,” Naomasa reminded the student. “If we can intercept his communications, it’s going to be more valuable than straight up arresting him. Our usual interrogation tactics won’t work when King knows All Might’s real appearance.” And what a technique it was, even if it did have some dangerous similarities to CIA interrogation techniques.

“Fine, but the prick shouldn’t have it easy in the mean time,” Bakugou was grumbling. Not that King seemed to be having a good time of it. All For One was alive and well… and King’s incomplete information had resulted in the death of a subject of interest. King was walking on eggshells for the foreseeable future and that was without the involvement of All Might or the police.

“Speaking of the arrest, I received permission to go ahead with the aforementioned plan.” Yagi stood and disappeared to his front door. Three sets of feet echoed back. A tiny woman and a grey haired man in subdued dress stood awkwardly behind Yagi. “Everyone, this is Danjuro Tobita and Manami Aiba, better known as Gentle Criminal and his offsider La Brava. They’re minor internet celebrities in addition to being criminals.” Yagi shrugged in a *what can you do type* motion, his game face firmly back in place.

“No fucking shit,” Bakugou whispered. “Guess it’s gonna take a criminal to catch a criminal.” They were known, but no too known.

“Indeed it is young man, we were approached by All Might to assist the police with some *community service*,” Tobita waved grandly. He skipped in with his offsider and they both took seats to Yagi’s right. “My friend and I have been offered amnesty by the police if we provide this assistance.”

Aiba nodded, her head downturned. “I… I heard about the boy who went missing saving his friends. Helping seems like the right thing to do and Gentle agrees.”

“Yes, it’s a tragic case. The League of Villains has caused insurmountable amounts of damage.” Tobita was eyeing the kettle as he spoke. “Not to mention when All Might appears on your front door

step, you're hardly in a position to tell him *no*." Yagi coughed and Naomasa struggled with not rolling his eyes. All Might hadn't appeared in months… unless it was to threaten two criminals into helping find his student. At this point, Naomasa really shouldn't have been surprised. Not after how he left Shigaraki, Kurogiri and other members of the League of Villains.

"Even other villains don't give a shit about the League, huh?" Bakugou seemed taken aback, but he would when Gentle Criminal wasn't your average villain. There'd been enough digging to realise that after being kicked out of his Heroics school that he'd gone about assisting the public good in a very different manner to what was legally allowed. His Quirk usage was also nowhere near as pathetic as the school had claimed as well. Naomasa would have to add an investigation of their conduct to his list as well.

"Not when they're murdering children on the regular, no." Tobita gazed over his clasped hands. "We of course are delighted to help you remedy this situation, with whatever assistance we can offer. I'm aware of the most basic of the details, All Might and Mr Yagi filled us in most thoroughly." Tobita's uncomfortable smile had Naomasa wondering exactly what the context of the briefing was beyond a front doorstep, but it was probably best not to think about it.

"Great," Bakugou was sneering. "Vlad King is responsible for the death of Deku. Any ideas for where you come in?"

Tobita gave a winning smile and turned to Yagi who had reverted to his usual, skulking public persona. "Ah, how was it that you put it, Mr Yagi? I believe words to the effect of *King's ass is grass and we're gonna mow it*? Yes, I do believe we can help with that. All we have to do is lure him out."

Yagi's answering grin would've spooked Naomasa if he couldn't see All Might written all over it.

Chapter End Notes

More migraines and another chapter.

Awakening

Chapter Summary

If your eyes are closed, are you sleeping?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Yaoyorozu had been right, it was too easy. Like, no amount of resistance easy. There was no haranguing, no real negotiations, not much of anything. Nothing that Eijirou had seen at least. Only the problem wasn't with Bakugou. Bakugou leapt at the opportunity to be away from his parents, to the surprise of almost everyone.

"Getting away from the old bag? Sign me the fuck up." More enthusiastic than they were expecting, but hey, whatever works? Mrs Midoriya needed help around the house and Bakugou needed a reason not to be in his house so it worked well for everyone.

And that was the end of it as far as they were concerned. At least until Bakugou arrived at school almost breathing fire. His hands were spewing so many sparklers that even Ida was reconsidering a warning. That was with the fire alarms poised to go off at any minute. If Bakugou could get it together before any teachers arrived, he'd be good.

"That old fucking hag," Bakugou snarled, chair legs groaning. Eijirou winced in sympathy for them.

"What's up, Bakugou?" Nothing good, obviously, but that didn't mean he shouldn't ask.

"She said no," Bakugou hissed and Eijirou did a double take. "And the wimp just sat there and agreed with her."

"What? Why?" From what Eijirou had seen of Bakugou's parents, he figured they'd be glad to be rid of him for a while. Bakugou was always glad to be as far away from his family as humanly possible. So it wasn't mutual?

"Because," Bakugou ground out, "they think I'll upset Deku's mother."

Eijirou stopped, then threw his back and roared with laughter. "They-

they think you'll upset Mrs Midoriya?" He couldn't help it, it was spilling out of him while Bakugou was turning an incandescent red. His hands were popping to match it. That was just crazy. What did Bakugou's parents think the guy did every afternoon? Kick puppies? Eijirou wondered what they'd say if they saw Bakugou in an apron bustling about Mrs Midoriya's kitchen with tubs of meals ready to be microwaved.

"The fuck are you laughing at, huh?" Bakugou snapped and Eijirou waved him away.

"Nah, it's not that man. Do they not know you've been visiting her with us for weeks now?" Another snigger escaped him and Eijirou clamped down on his teeth. Bakugou was upset for a real reason. He shouldn't be laughing at it, even if how wrong they were was funny it a sad way.

"Oh, they fucking know alright, but they think I'm a *burden*," Bakugou emphasised so snidely that Eijirou lost it a second time. "Think I'll be kidnapped from there even though they're both weaklings themselves. Like they could fucking stop anyone."

"But you've been cooking for her more days than not," Eijirou shook his head, grinning broadly. Bakugou cooked more than the rest of them did. And did the laundry. And did the utility bills. And cleaned. And… did almost everything, really and that was when Todoroki was still hiding out.

"Convince them about that," Bakugou shot back. "Nothing I say fucking matters in that house. Never has and after fucking Shit Fingers, it never will. They think I'm a bag of fucking dirt."

"Maybe some wriggle roo-?"

"-None," Bakugou cut in. "They don't want to fucking hear it. Doesn't matter how reasonable am, no matter how much I keep my fucking temper, neither want to fucking listen. Fucking useless. Why the fuck did they even have a kid?" Yeah, that wasn't something anyone really wanted to think about, but Bakugou's parents did seem like the sort who'd have a kid just for the hell of it. There were a lot of people around who thought that being married meant them having kids… even if it wasn't the right thing to do for the kid.

Bakugou grunted one last time and that was it really. Arrangements were made between Ida, Yaoyorozu and Mrs Midoriya and days later they were good to go. Eijirou was at the rear with Bakugou and a

squirrelly Mrs Midoriya whose eyes were darting at the landscaping either side of the path to the front door. Ida and Yaoyorozu were marching at the head of the pack and Ida firmly pressed the doorbell. Eijirou wasn't sure if Mrs Midoriya was always just that pale or if she was going to faint. Best to be on the lookout for the latter.

They approached the front door and Bakugou assumed the brace position in the corner of Eijirou's eye. The door exploded open. "KATS- oh, Katsuki's friends," Bakugou's female body double grunted. "How can I help you?" If it wasn't for Mrs Bakugou's feminine characteristics, Eijirou would have mistaken her for Bakugou's older brother. His far more coarse older brother. Bakugou was at least getting the hang of his indoor voice.

"We're here to discuss your son helping out Mrs Midoriya while the police conduct their investigations around her son's disappearance," Yaoyorozu coolly explained. "We heard that you had some concerns about him being a burden on Mrs Midoriya and came to allay them for you." And also see what Bakugou was dealing with. The longer it went on and the more complaints Bakugou had about his family, it was getting clearer that something was up in that house. Todoroki was the first to suggest they go check out the place for anything incriminating. His words as well. *Incriminating*. Like they were going to walk in on a murder.

"Are you going to come in?" Mrs Bakugou snapped and Eijirou saw her son's eye twitch.

"No, that'll be quite alright, Mrs Bakugou, we don't want to impede upon your hospitality," Ida smoothly intercepted. Maybe it was just Eijirou, but Ida didn't seem too thrilled with Mrs Bakugou's hospitality when she first got to the door. Ida's expression was the same as the owner of a dog who splattered mud throughout the house. "We just want you to know that as a representative of the class, your son has the class' full support in his continued assistance of Mrs Midoriya." Mrs Midoriya head jerked in response. Whether it was in approval or not, Eijirou couldn't tell. Her eyes were firmly ground facing, as if just the effort of staring straight ahead was too much for her. After what Eijirou had seen, that might really be the case. She didn't really speak much these days.

"Assistance? Katsuki?" Mrs Bakugou snorted. "What's he been doing? Chasing the neighbourhood cats away?"

In response to that, there was dead silence. Almost like the aftermath

of a concussion grenade. If Eijirou listened closely enough, he could hear Bakugou gnashing his teeth.

“My apologies, Mrs Bakugou, but what does any of that have to do with your son’s ongoing assistance of Mrs Midoriya?” Ida sounded as lost as Eijirou would have felt… if he hadn’t just remembered Todoroki’s dire warnings. Come to think of it, he was half expecting the guy to leap out of a bush with an unemotional “I told you so”. Something bad was up in this house.

“I doubt he’s been doing much, has he?” Eijirou, as today’s impromptu weatherman, was forecasting a large explosion. “He sure as hell doesn’t do anything around here. Lounges around doing who knows what, moping. When he’s out he’s hours late coming back and won’t say why. Are you really trying to tell me he’s been taking care of Mrs Midoriya?”

“Yes, he has been,” Yaoyorozu’s tone of voice hadn’t changed, but her expression had. “He’s been instrumental in organising the rosters of who visits, since Mrs Midoriya support network is elsewhere occupied.” Non-existent more like it. Mr and Mrs Midoriya didn’t have any other relatives apart from their son. Mrs Midoriya also didn’t really have any friends that they could find and her husband was uncontactable. The woman was a total loner in a way that would make even Bakugou’s aspirations pale and reconsider their life choices.

“It’s a bit too late for that after him being a weakling made her son go missing, isn’t it?”

SLAP!

There was sound and a new colour. Impact of flesh on flesh and a blur of dark green. Before Eijirou or anyone else could move, there was Inko Midoriya. Open hand raised. The other fist clenched. Every part of her tensed, trembling with *something*. As if she’d teleported across that handful of steps instead of stalked forward like some angry predatory.

Mitsuki Bakugou was flat on her rear on her own front step, her eyes unfocused before narrowing into what might have been fury.

There was an explosion alright, just not the one Eijirou had been expecting.

“I… I won’t stand here and listen to you speak so poorly of your own

son," Inko Midoriya hissed. Her hand was still raised, her eyes shadowed. "Your son and his friends were the ones who helped me the most since Izuku disappeared. Not the neighbours, not UA's teachers, not you and not anyone else. *Them.* Your son is welcome to stay with me whether you like it or not." Her hand was arching backwards, as if for another pass.

Bakugou's body double staggered back to her feet, a glowing red handprint visible on her face. Without another word, she scampered back inside and slammed the door shut behind her. Inko Midoriya's hand dropped and she turned on her heel.

"Mrs Bakugou! Mrs Midoriya!" Ida called to no avail. One was already gone and the other was in the process of being gone. Inko Midoriya marched back the way they came, while the rest of their party stared after her.

"Holy shit," Bakugou's hanging jaw hurriedly slammed shut. "Why the fuck she didn't do that years ago, I'll never fucking know."

Wait, what? "Why would Midoriya's mother be slapping your mother years ago?" He was so lost. What just happened? He dimly registered Yaoyorozu and Ida sprinting after Mrs Midoriya and yelling at her to wait. It had an oddly dreamy quality to it, like what just happened wasn't quite real.

"The old hag used to give Deku shit over the dumbest fucking stuff. Mrs Midoriya didn't do shit and the old hag used to walk all over him…" Bakugou trailed off, leaving Eijirou with the sneaking suspicion that there was more to Bakugou's behaviour than he was ever going to tell them about. Not willingly at least.

"Right…" Not really. Telling off someone else's kid was pretty rude, come to think of it and Midoriya was a quiet kid. Why would Mrs Bakugou even be speaking to him? Not like he could ask her now after Mrs Midoriya's flat hand to the face. A little bit awkward.

Meanwhile, the blond behind him sighed. It wasn't the most irritated noise Eijirou had heard, but it was up there, right along with the noise he made when Nighteye's name was mentioned. "Fuck this shit, I'm out. The old hag lost this round."

"What does that mean?" Was Bakugou really going to determine this based on a single blow? They hadn't even really spoken to Mrs Bakugou yet.

“She lost. Mrs Midoriya left her flat on her arse. It’s her rules and she lost.” Bakugou had to be kidding. What screwed up family made decisions over who won brawls? “I’m getting my shit and we can get the fuck out of here.” Okay, maybe he wasn’t kidding.

“This is so not cool, man. She just took out your mum.” It was a brutal hit too. Eijirou’s face hardened when he saw it land. And that instant handprint. Yeesh. A handprint for the ages. That’s how long her neighbours would be talking about it anyway.

“And? Sling shit, get hit. If she wants to play a stupid game, she can get a stupid fucking prize. Why the fuck would you say that to someone’s whose son is dead? Fucking moron.” Without so much as a glance back, Bakugou wrenched open his front door and stomped inside. “Hey losers! I’m fucking going away for a bit, don’t sell my shit!” Bakugou screamed into the building.

Eijirou paused and thought about it for a moment. Then shrugged. Yeah, Bakugou had a point there. Talking smack about a dead and or missing kid to their mother was guaranteed to get someone hurt. And this time it wasn’t even Bakugou doing the hurting.

There was… someone crying? In the shadows and the murkiness, Izuku couldn’t see or even really feel the source through the sound. Even then, the dark was misty… as if it wasn’t darkness at all, but some sort of imitation. He could hear it if not locate it, wracking sobs that echoed through the space. Izuku felt the air around him flex in synchronisation with the wails. Wails that never seemed to end, only fluctuating up and down as if whoever was crying wasn’t even stopping to breathe. Howls that weighed his chest down. It was one of the most mournful and depressing sounds Izuku could ever remember hearing and he’d seen a lot of post-disaster interviews with families.

“So you’re the ninth. You can hear it too, can’t you?” A voice whispered and Izuku would have leapt a foot in the air… if not for the fact that he had no legs, was down an arm and was missing almost everything else. He had eyes, but no way to turn to the new source of sound.

Izuku blinked once, hoping it would be understood as a yes. Provided he could even be seen.

“We wanted to show you something else, but this noise is more concerning.” *We?* Izuku wondered. Was it a dream? “We don’t know

where it's coming from."

Izuku blinked three times. If the owner of the voice existed in this space, then why it couldn't recognise the source was worrying. Worrying because Izuku was stuck with them listening to something… someone's never ending misery. A misery he couldn't even begin to wonder about how to fix. The heavy sensation in his chest was only growing and the keening was sending spikes of pain through his non-existent head.

"You don't know either, do you?" The voice asked.

Izuku blinked once.

"These feelings are alien. If they're not from you and it's not from us, then where are they from?" It carried on. "We have no recollection of anything this intense. No memories of such rawness. This is new."

Izuku would have been thrilled to speculate aloud, but that clearly wasn't possible. Izuku wasn't even sure he was speaking to someone who could understand him and blinked three more times.

"Oh, my apologies, you can't see me." From the corner of his eye, a hunched figure slouched into view and Izuku was struck by deja vu. This was one of the silhouette's from the Sports Festival! Izuku must be inside One For All again! But why? There hadn't been anything to cause it. Was it him waking up? "We don't have much longer… This noise is a distraction. Next time, I'll show you more for sure… but in the meantime, beware your captor!"

Izuku blinked and he awoke with a swirl of colour. Awoke with both arms pinned to his bed. Guess that explained the warning.

"Izuku?" All For One murmured from a point far too close to Izuku's face.

"Erm…" Izuku mumbled unintelligibly. Well, until he looked down noticed that his arms were glowing and yelped in a way Kacchan would have laughed at.

"I'm going to assume this isn't deliberate?" All For One taut voice sounded from just outside Izuku's field of view.

Izuku frantically shook his head, feeling something crawling under the surface of his skin. It hurt. Then it didn't. His limbs seized and he was pinned by more than just All For One's arms (a Paralysis Quirk?), then

both One For All and All For One's Quirk faded. None of that stopped Izuku's mouth from immediately dropping open in horror.

"Now, that, little Izuku, is *frightening*." All For One's stilted tone was one of the few times Izuku could perfectly relate to whatever it was All For One was feeling. Somewhere between horror and a complete lack of understanding that was so normal it only compounded Izuku's sense of offness. The reaction was too relatable. Too absolutely average.

"I don't know what just happened," Izuku almost squeaked. What was that in his arm? Why was it so dark?

"I was under the impression that my brother's Quirk was a mere enhancement that stockpiled energy…" All For One was back in view and the depth of his frown was something to behold. "Now I'm starting to wonder otherwise."

Izuku shrugged, because what else could he do? All Might didn't know about this either.

"Did anything happen while you were asleep?" All For One asked after a small pause while his frown escalated to new heights of displeasure. While not being directed at him, Izuku had a sneaking suspicion as to the real target.

Izuku was going to have to tell him something, he wasn't a good enough liar to make something entirely different up… Well, there was only one important and different part to the dream. Clearing his throat, Izuku's felt his face twist. "I had a weird dream."

All For One made a go on gesture with his hand. "Of course it was a dream." With that level of bitterness, Izuku could only assume there was no small amount of experience to that comment.

"Someone was wailing," Izuku began, shuddering. Where had that even come from? One For All said it wasn't responsible. If it wasn't the Quirk then what was it? "It was-it was more screaming almost and it… it didn't stop. It just kept going and getting worse. I couldn't see who it was, because it was dark." Going silent, Izuku only caught a glimpse of All For One's fingers flexing.

"And why did this cause you so much distress, specifically?" It was a perfectly level and entirely insensitive question. "I don't think it was your distress, you were entirely silent when the effect crept into the real world." Or it was All For One asking about that. Both worked.

“I couldn’t help them. I tried to reach out to find them and I couldn’t move,” Izuku cringed. Then he’d woken up pinned too. Couldn’t move, couldn’t reach. “I couldn’t do anything.”

“And that’s what caused you so much distress,” All For One quietly concluded.

Izuku nodded.

“This is always something that’s bothered you, isn’t it?” The old man asked, his mouth still curled downwards. “What came first, the concern or All Might?”

Izuku blinked. Was All For One asking what Izuku thought he was asking? “All Might wasn’t first. I’ve… I’ve always been like this.” For as far back and for as long as Izuku could remember, there was that lump of warmth in his chest that grew with every person he helped. “But All Might’s different to the other pro heroes.” Extremely different. Different enough to be worthy of the title of the best.

“I keep hearing that and I will never understand what makes him so different to his other predecessor’s that made their attempts on my life.” Such was All For One’s frosty tone that Izuku almost felt a chill breeze roll through the room. Clearly having a long lifespan wasn’t all that with so many people dedicated towards his eradication.

“It’s-it’s not that,” Izuku frantically shook his head. “All Might isn’t obligated to do most of what he does. None of the pro heroes are. The law requires them to act only in cases where villains are involved.” No, pro heroes in reality were only about who got to use what Quirk. Only their own personal morals had them go above and beyond their duty to stop those illegally using Quirks. Kacchan’s lack of a rescue by anyone apart from All Might was proof of that. Saving a building while Kacchan suffocated… while no one tried to help. They might be pros, but they weren’t very good heroes.

After the fiend had leant back into his seat, Izuku was again given the carry on gesture. “All Might goes beyond what he’s legally required to do. That’s… that’s not really common with pro heroes. He helps people with cats up trees, kids who fall into deep water, people who are born with unfortunate Quirks… and he does it without being paid for it.” All For One almost seemed to be holding his breath with the stilted rise and fall of his chest. “Lots of pro heroes are only there for the fame and money, but All Might stumbled into it by being a genuine hero and not just a pro hero. He joined to help people and

that's… that's really rare," Izuku concluded, feeling an inch tall.

Contrary to Izuku's expectations, All For One shifted to rest his head on one hand. "So you admire All Might not for his legal status, but his defying of its strict limitations?" That was an insidious way to put it, but it wasn't technically wrong. All Might definitely went against commonly accepted conventions for pro heroes.

"I guess you can put it like that." Since he was a supervillain. "I've always admired the people who were the precursors to the pro heroes, before they introduced the system. They were the only ones willing to act when no one else was." Izuku's bounce was brief and painful, the skin on his back pulling on the dressing. "But, there's not a lot of records around about them anymore. It was so long ago and they've sealed away most of them into archives I can't access." Far far away where they were echoes in history. Understandable when the government was going out of its way to deter vigilantism. It was one thing to talk about the immediate precursors who helped form the system, another to promote the ones who continued without government sponsorship. It might give people ideas… People like Izuku.

All For One was frozen, like a statue in a museum. He was old enough to be in one after all. "The precursors?"

"Yeah," Izuku confirmed, "I guess… it would have been when you were much younger, right?"

"Yes, it was," All For One whispered. "After all, I was one of them if you're speaking of that time period."

With the grace of train derailment, Izuku's brain exploded into action and all sensible reason was hurled away. "You were *what*?" Izuku wasn't sure who was more surprised by the revelation; Izuku for the discovery or All For One because of Izuku's militant interest in the original heroes. But it made sense!

"A vigilante is what they would call me by today's meaning," All For One almost seemed to tentatively confirm. "Naturally, I wasn't picked to be part of their little government enforcement squad."

"I knew it!" Izuku bounced into the air, completely undaunted by the surge of pain that shot across his back and through his chest. "It makes sense! You don't like pro heroes or villains because you're originally neither!" It was only a piece in the puzzle though. It didn't do anything to explain All For One's current state or his sponsorship of

the Noumu.

Only to find himself yanked from the air and forced downwards. “Izuku, I realise you’re excited, but please *don’t* tear your wounds open.”

Whoops. “Okay! But I’m right, right?” That was the important detail here. All For One hadn’t started his career as a full blown villain. It made sense!

If All For One still had eyes Izuku was positive he would have been rolling them. “They’re the same thing, Izuku. One group gets a pat on the head by the government and the other doesn’t. There’s no functional difference between them.”

“Yes, there is,” Izuku shot back. “How many people have you helped recently without asking for anything?” Izuku was going to bet his money on a healthy dose of none.

“You,” All For One leisurely returned. “One can still be an experienced member of the criminal underworld and still have the capacity for the occasional good deed.”

“But that was after you killed me,” Izuku returned fire.

“Why does this always come back to me killing you?” All For One sighed, as if Izuku pointing it out had caused him great personal harm.

Izuku charged straight past it. “And if that criminal only does one occasional good deed after murdering people for two hundred years, then it’s not enough to balance out what happened before.” Izuku shook his head, feeling his heart skip a beat. “You have to at least be consistent.”

“I wasn’t killing people for two centuries.” Now he sounded downright offended.

“Then what were you doing?” Both knew where this was going.

“I was reallocating the Quirks of the unworthy. What else would I have been doing?” All For One extended his hands in a grand gesture that Izuku, that left All For One silhouetted as nothing more than a black shadow. Izuku would have taken a moment to marvel at the image if he wasn’t on the offence.

“What about all the people your followers killed for you?” It was a

wild, wild stab in the dark. The tattered edge of a feeling, but it felt *right*. Right in a way it shouldn't have because Izuku had no idea where the idea even would have come from. Yes, All For One led the masses, but would he really have enjoyed the loss of control over a group that was interpreting body language instead of following explicit orders? Izuku's gut feeling told him it was a yes, while his brain screamed no.

All For One's arms dropped. "How could you possibly know about that?" Not threatening. Dumbfounded. Off-kilter? That was perfectly fine when Izuku was feeling the same way.

"I have… absolutely no idea," Izuku admitted. "But, I'm right, right?" That was the important part.

"Yes, but that's ancient history. How could you possibly know about it?" All For One was leaning forwards, that same frown had returned. "We've come full circle, haven't we, little one?"

Izuku shrugged. "The original owner never wrote a manual for it." Though now, All For One seemed to have enough encouragement to get around to it. So what if he was over a hundred years late? It was only the difference between Izuku's arms torn off or not. Izuku resisted the urge to laugh nervously at what would've happened without the Paralysis Quirk.

All For One groaned. "Don't remind me. Please. I lose enough sleep over that Quirk every night."

"Are… are you going to write a manual?" Izuku might have been pushing his luck here, but it was worth asking. One For All was a… a really weird Quirk. So was All For One's for that matter. Two peas in a pod.

"No." All For One answered definitively. "But you can write while I dictate."

Izuku shrugged. It was something he could work with.

If Enji Todoroki had to spare another minute staring at this blasted empty room, he was going to shove a fiery fist through the glass. The police had called him in to witness an interrogation. They wanted him as a sort of expert on one of the captured members of the League of Villains. Why they were wasting his time with this menial tripe while

his youngest was off doing god knows what was beyond understanding. All For One was still on the loose as well while All Might dithered and also did god knows what off in some secluded location. Was Enji the only person doing his job these days? Was it too much to ask for that everyone else be prepared for the psychopath who was still roaming the streets?

SNAP!

Enji did not jump. He was merely startled. Startled by the suit wearing, emaciated skeleton that slid into the room with a full tray of coffee and biscuits. The door clicked shut ominously behind him.

“My apologies. Did I startle you?” It didn’t sound like much of an apology.

“Who are you?” Enji grunted.

“I’m Detective Yagi, partner to Detective Tsukauchi.” Yagi made no attempt to bow or shake hands. “To allay your concerns, you’re here today to help us with identifying one of the more mysterious members of the League.” Was that it? Really?

“Surely there’s other more qualified people around for an identification,” Enji growled at the rude stick of a man. People who had time to waste doing petty things like identifying criminals.

“No, unfortunately not in this case, Endeavor. Intel determined that you were the best and most reliable option for identifying this particular villain.”

Enji rolled his eyes. “So what do you want me to do?” Apart from waste everyone’s time.

“Watch. My colleague-” Yagi rapped sharply on the door “-will accompany you in any observations you make.” A cat headed man in a standard police uniform holding his own tray, entered and bowed. On it sat a teapot, two cups and…. a shot glass? Professionals standards doing their usual quality of work.

“Right, I’ll be off. Good luck.” Why did Enji need any luck? Yagi, still holding his tray, exited without another word.

“Is he always like that?” Enji demanded from the officer next to him.

The cat headed man nodded. “You should have seen his orientation

day. People are still complaining about it." That left Enji with more than a handful of reservations about this detective he hadn't heard of before, but there was something familiar about the name Yagi… He couldn't quite put his finger on it.

There was a quiet click and Enji watched through the glass as a dark haired man was wheeled in, straightjacketed to his wheelchair. His face was purpled and stitched together with patches of horrific scars. How he hadn't died yet from necrosis was a medical miracle that was never going to be investigated. There was something familiar about this one as well. Just like Yagi it rung a bell.

For a moment, he seemed to struggle then went limp with a huff of air. The officer who brought him in left without a word.

A minute passed and the door flew open again.

"Good morning, Dabi!" Yagi was entirely too cheerful for what had to be five o'clock in the morning. "How was your sleep?"

"I didn't," Dabi growled and Enji felt that same rush of familiarity. It was two words and it held a feeling to it. Maybe a memory? Was this someone he'd arrested a long time ago once before? It didn't seem like this Dabi was old enough for that to be the case. What kind of name was Dabi? *Cremation* of all things. An alias clearly, but not one from someone blessed with Mensa level intelligence. "You were here, what, three hours ago?"

"Was I?" Yagi shrugged, placing the tray on the table and dragging over a fold up camping chair. "Must have been the paperwork. Time flies when you're approaching deadlines."

"Don't you weaklings work from 9-5 like every other office worker?" That might have been an insult… but Yagi chuckled.

"I wish. I could do with a white collar salary package. Been itching for a new car."

"Shut up. We both know what you're here for," Dabi spat back. Now that was much more familiar. The cat headed man next to him was staring between them.

"Do we? I'm still not sure what I'm here for, Dabi. Not until you tell me just how involved you were with the League. After all, there's a huge difference between what you're going to be asked." Yagi's hands were steepled regally. It would have left more of an impact if he

wasn't fixated on his coffee instead of his prisoner. Yagi was provoking the prisoner. That much was clear.

"I'm not telling you anything," Dabi smirked. "What's a weakling like you going to do about it, huh? You can't touch me."

"Oh you're quite correct, Dabi." Yagi's approximation of a winning smile sent chills down Enji's spine. "I can't touch you. But there are other ways of extracting information."

"Like what, you skele-" And Dabi gasped, his mouth sagging, he was changing colour. It was like Yagi had wrapped a giant, clawed hand around Dabi's ribs and crushed them. Spittle flew from his lips and he rocked back and forth in his restraints.

Enji rose to intervene and found himself caught by the same sensation of malice, dread, death. He could only stare at them. Enji stared and stared some more at Dabi's writing features, sinking back into his chair. In his mind, the scarring cleared, the hair lightened and he was struck by the familiar of features he'd spent all too long glaring at in years gone by. Features that had been absent from the family when the boy disappeared from UA without a trace. Abandoned his education and fled. The police never found him… so much as they found what was left of him. Enji's stomach writhed even more when he thought about his youngest's ongoing disappearance.

"Touya?" Enji whispered through the weight, his eldest thrashing wildly in his restraints. His wounds were open and bleeding, his eyes rolling and mad. More animal than human. And that was his son…the family embarrassment, screaming for his life while Yagi advanced. Such an ungodly, hideous noise. It needed to stop. Enji wanted it to stop. What was Yagi doing? What was hurting him? Why wasn't he stopping?

"Sorry buddy," the cat headed man offered him a suspiciously amber liquid in a shot glass and an untouched cup of tea, "but we didn't know how else to tell you." He tipped the shot glass into the tea and pushed over the whole saucer. "He's been trying to play games for the last few weeks so we pulled out the big guns." This was the big guns? This was torture!

Enji was again already halfway to his feet when the cat man tugged him back into his seat. There was no resistance, only a tumble of words. "Where's Tsukauchi? Why are you letting this happen to my-my…" Was that really even his son? It was a pale shadow at best.

Ruined and wrecked by what? A villain? What happened to Touya? Why?

“Tsukauchi’s at the other end of the door, waiting to be the good cop. I’m Sansa, by the way,” the cat headed man beamed. Beamed while his son screamed. “It’s nothing permanent and it’s not a Quirk. Yagi’s just a scary sonuvabitch.” What even was that? An aura of malaise he’d only felt twice before. Felt from that bastard All For One at Kamino and that lunatic Stain. Who the hell was this guy and why was there such a large chip on his shoulder?

“Can he even breathe while that’s happening?” Enji demanded pushing aside the cup of tea only to be gently be rebuffed again. Sansa was insistent.

“You’re not really in a position to be making demands, Endeavor,” answered the cat man coolly. “He ended up this way somehow and with how early into life he went missing, all eyes aren’t on some League of Villains type operation.” Endeavor, for all his flames, felt very very cold. They couldn’t seriously be suggesting that he was responsible for Touya’s evident breakdown.

“They’re on you and your wife, who’s now in a mental hospital. They’re also on your youngest son who’s been Houdini’ing his way around every pro hero and cop whose set eyes on him.” Sansa’s human hands were clasped on the tiny table between them. “Now what are we meant to think when the eldest is about to be committed to an asylum for the criminally insane, your daughter is now running most of the household and your two youngest want nothing to do with you?”

“This is idiocy. How dare you excuse me of anything when that’s happening in the next room?” Enji felt his flames spark up a notch. How dare this grunt make accusations about anything. While Yagi was waterboarding someone’s son in the next room over.

“Don’t look at me, Endeavor, I’m just telling you what everyone else is thinking.” Sansa stirred his own tea with a gentle clink. All the while the screams were still sounding through the glass. “And that everyone is going to include the media as soon as this goes public.”

Enji felt himself pale.

“Consider this a friendly warning. All Might wanted us to let you know.” Sansa slapped him on the back in a manner that was anything but friendly.

Enji downed the laced tea without a second thought, All Might be damned.

They were the oddest pairing the doctor had ever set eyes on and would remain that way for the foreseeable future. There was the boy curled up against Sensei's side on the plush couch, with Sensei's hand carefully wrapped around the boy's own. The IV was hovering nearby, with just enough give to allow Midoriya to move without tearing it clean out with a more urgent gesturing of his hands. In front on them was a generously sized television streaming a live villain attack. Sensei was altogether too non-plussed by Midoriya's proximity and the blanket that had been draped over the both of them. Sensei who wouldn't give Shigaraki the time of day, let alone engage in something so mundane with him.

"I can't believe he didn't just hit him with the saucepan," Izuku Midoriya remarked to his viewing companion who was, to no one's surprise, listening more than watching.

"How is that more effective than using his Quirk?" Sensei's chin was leaning on his other hand.

"Have you seen what saucepans do to a normal person?" Midoriya sounded appalled. The doctor was also appalled, but for entirely different reasons. How did Midoriya know about saucepan impacts? Was there some unknown depths of expertise that Sensei was tapping?

Sensei seemed to be lost in thought for a moment. "Hmm…"

"That's a hotel. That's a culinary quality saucepan," Midoriya seemed to remind Sensei. Sensei who was… inclining a head in consideration. "There's no way he's going to match the force with that sort of weak air pressure." Indeed, the pro hero appeared to be shooting blasts of air at a relatively humanoid villain who was dodging them with practised ease. Not that he could hold a candle to Sensei with those pathetic little puffs of air.

"True. The thickness of the base is going to be troublesome for anyone without adequate resistance to blunt force impact," All For One admitted. "Unless he has muscle built up from dealing with the inertia of his Speed Quirk."

"He could have just brained him with it and saved everyone the time and effort," Midoriya was continuing, a hand twitching in animation.

“His skull has no muscle to build from gravitational forces pulling against it. That’d be a really strange mutation in addition to his Quirk.”

“Also very true. If there’s no adaptions then his skull should be relatively ripe for the blow.” Even while Sensei was likely wincing at the thought of blows to the head with any sort of blunt object.

Then, as though a prophecy had been made, the doctor watched the pro hero Air Shot seize ahold of the aforementioned saucepan and crack it across the villain’s head. The saucepan and villain alike seemed to vibrate violently for a moment, then the latter fell to the ground. The pleasant ringing noise the saucepan made lingered for a moment longer than the collapse of the villain.

“See? Much more efficient,” Midoriya bobbed his head. “It just wasn’t a good match up.” The doctor was almost sure that for Midoriya there were other rules to the average person for poor Quirk matching. In case of emergency, slam the problem as hard as you can across the face with a blunt object and hope for the best.

“Why weren’t you in charge of stockpile efficiency years ago?” Sensei sighed and the doctor swallowed air rapidly. “So much time could have been saved and used better elsewhere.” There was a longing note in there that made the doctor's skin crawl.

“You couldn’t afford me,” Midoriya solemnly declared and the doctor almost dropped his beaker. Not that he could let that happen, it'd delay prep of their medications. “My rates are higher than what you paid Shigaraki’s cannon fodder.”

“Personally, Izuku, I think the greater problem here is that you would have encouraged me to engage All Might with a frying pan regardless of your pay,” Sensei noted, as if he was discussing the previous morning's political polling.

“I think you would’ve had a better chance of killing him with the frying pan than what really happened,” Midoriya quietly sighed. “You just had to stop to taunt him before he was even dead.” There it was again, that niggling how. How did Midoriya know so much when Sensei refused to even discuss it with the doctor who treated those wounds?

“Izuku, there is no point in soundly vanquishing a hated nemesis if you can’t have the last say while doing do,” Sensei almost seemed to chide. There was a note of amusement in his voice that had the doctor

raising his eyebrows.

“And now he’s still alive,” Midoriya continued. “You just couldn’t let it go…” Let what go? What was Midoriya talking about? What did he know that they didn’t?

“You’re in no position to be lecturing me after your attempt to kill Tomura.” Sensei’s voice was anything but retaliatory. In fact, he sounded closer to dissolving into laughter.

It brought Midoriya up short for only a split second. “He attacked us first! What else was I meant to do?” Indignation. Pure indignation that he was being called out for attempted murder. What happened to this child in the intervening years? What made him like this?

“Not attempt to leave him a fine smear on his surroundings?” Sensei patiently explained.

“I didn’t have a lot of options and I wasn’t going to sit there and let him attack Asui.” Midoriya’s heels were firmly sunk into the ground. There wasn’t going to be any budging of them. But a near death over an assault?

“You attempted to aerate Tomura and the better part of the USJ. If the Noumu hadn’t taken the impact, Tomura would have ceased to exist, as would most of the building.” How powerful were Midoriya’s blows to cause that much damage? Even All Might’s Quirk didn’t seem to carry the same risk of impending death as Midoriya. Midoriya who was, from Sensei’s own words, faster than All Might to resort to lethal force. A deadly combination.

Midoriya shrugged. Just shrugged. “He attacked us first.”’

“And Stain? You punctured his lungs.”

“He’s a serial killer. There was absolutely nothing stopping him from coming after us when he was done with Native.” Stain? Why on Earth was Midoriya involved with the Stain incident?

“You buried Muscular into the side of a mountain.” That one the doctor knew about. Muscular’s Quirk was the only thing that saved him from certain death. Not that death wouldn’t have been preferably after… after what? His attack on one of Sensei’s affiliates? Either way, death would have been a huge favour to the man.

“He tried to kill a kid!” The doctor was seeing a pattern.

“What about Wolfram’s face that you almost tore off?” Midoriya did what? On second thoughts, was there a pattern?

“He tried to kill me and All Might agreed with that!”

“I’m sure he did,” Sensei grumbled so snidely that the doctor had to hold back a snort of his own. “None of this stopped you from also tearing poor Tomura apart for asking you simple questions.”

“He tried to kill me there too!” What, when did that happen?

“What about Todoroki?”

“He wasn’t using his Quirk correctly!” Midoriya fired back. “If he didn’t use all of it, Stain would have killed him. And if it wasn’t Stain it would have been someone else.” The doctor wasn’t even sure what to call this incident. It wasn’t quite an argument, more like an aggressive session of fact clarification. Though how much of it was Sensei baiting the boy and how much of it was the boy using it as an excuse to criticise Sensei was beyond him. How much history was there between these two?

“I think the point you’re missing Izuku, is that your list of attempts to maim and or kill people is higher than mine in recent years,” Sensei said in an almost soothing manner. “It happens, I know, but these excuses are beneath you.”

Midoriya sputtered even more indignantly, if it was at all possible. “Excuses? Aren’t you the one who allowed the attack on Kacchan just to get Ragdoll’s Quirk?”

“That wasn’t the only reason,” Sensei expertly deflected. The doctor had to side with Midoriya on this one. That camp attack was a rather transparent make for Search. The doctor still wasn’t sure what Search was even being used for at the moment, but Sensei was desperate to have it. Bakugou was a footnote on that expedition.

“But it was the main one, right?” Midoriya was pushing now. “Have you ever considered that maybe your kleptomania might be a problem? I bet you knew full well that Kacchan wasn’t going to agree to any of your deals.” That was another point of Midoriya. Sensei definitely knew that Bakugou wasn’t going to be taking orders from an… individual like Shigaraki. In fact, the doctor whole heartedly sympathised with Bakugou in this instance. Shigaraki had done nothing to prove his worth, but only lost assets to petulant behaviours. At least Midoriya, for all of his recalcitrant attitude, was a shrewd

observer of the world and people around him. Perhaps too shrewd.

“Kleptomania? I do not steal everything not nailed down,” Sensei refuted, as if that particular idea was more offensive to him than the implication that Bakugou was there to be tortured alone. In the doctor’s very frank opinion, Midoriya had scored another point there, because being accused of kleptomania and the associated lack of control was a more insulting idea to Sensei than acts of grievous bodily harm. In fact, when it came to personal wrongs, Sensei was quite partial to extreme bodily harm. But how did Midoriya know about that? The doctor had spent years under Sensei and Midoriya had never been seen in those orbits.

“Is that why you’re window shopping right now?” Midoriya was… exasperated, not angry and Sensei was silent. Ever so quiet. “I understand. I’m not saying that your Quirk is a bad thing, but you really need to work out what’s you and what’s the Quirk.”

“It’s unusual for someone to make that distinction,” Sensei murmured into Midoriya’s hair. Midoriya who was frantically scrabbling to escape, even with Sensei still holding onto him. Midoriya better not rip his IV out, those were so irritating to replace on people with more bone and skin than flesh.

“I wish you’d make the distinction between self defence and attempted murder,” Midoriya managed to cough out before he was reeled back in.

“Keep dreaming, Izuku.”

The doctor wasn't entirely sure if Midoriya was the one who was dreaming. Not when the doctor felt like he'd stepped into a surrealist painting where the boundaries of reality were constantly shifting without him even being aware of it.

Chapter End Notes

And now we pick up the pace.

Triggered

Chapter Summary

Some things are both better and worse than death.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

All For One wasn't very happy person, as Izuku had come to discover in his days trapped with the centennial. Not just in the sense of joy or amusement, either. As hard as Izuku searched, it was almost like he was speaking to a partial chunk of a person and not a whole one. Reactions were disjointed, stilted, sporadic. His temperament, if it could be called that, was mercurial and volatile for all the man tried to hide it behind snide comments. There was no consistency in what should have been a consistent human being. Some behaviours were too normal, like how he drank his tea. Others were far more extreme, like his bitterness towards All Might, who by all accounts, wasn't really any different to previous One For All holders. All For One was a shattered, broken person and that didn't just apply to his physical injuries, because nothing he did seemed to make him truly happy. Though the physical injuries were an accurate representation of what had to be floating around the man's head.

Nine generations of One For All. If each generation lasted twenty years on average, All For One was close to two hundred years old even at a conservative guess. Far older than probably anyone else on the planet. Humans weren't originally meant to live past fifty, but with modern technology they crept into roughly a century of age before Quirks hit. Now, after Quirks, there was someone much older and, as far as Izuku could tell, human biology hadn't been able to keep up. All For One seemed to be trapped in his own fictional set of expectations even though time was always marching on… But that didn't make sense either or Izuku would have cheerfully been left under the building as part of his dispute with All Might. Unless that was part of the contradictions?

Countless conflicting actions. From malice to doting, indifference to outrage, emotional to emotionless, All For One rubber banded from one state to another. Izuku was sure some of it was being exaggerated, but then again there was just as much that couldn't have been faked. How much weighed on either end Izuku couldn't say, but more and

more wasn't adding up. Izuku could feel the pressure from the contradictions grow. All For One wasn't here to distract him from the train of thought this time and acid swirled unpleasantly in his stomach.

All For One was on first name terms with Shigaraki. But he still left him and his entire organisation to be taken down by All Might in favour of Izuku. Without any regret whatsoever.

All For One trusted Tsubasa enough with the details of his Quirk. But he still wouldn't allow him near Izuku for any great period of time. Tsubasa who was in charge of the Noumu.

All For One weaponised countless people to create the Noumu. But here was Izuku, so far with his mind (mostly) intact.

All For One sluiced through One For All wielders… because of the feud with his brother? But here was Izuku, still alive, in spite of having the same Quirk.

All For One wiped out a city, murdering countless people. But here was Izuku, the only person rescued from it.

Too much time to dwell, too much time to think, Izuku's old habit was swallowing him. All For One made absolutely no sense in any logical or emotional capacity. He couldn't be interested in One For All, not when he'd spent years killing the previous wielders. He couldn't be interested in Izuku himself because Izuku was a nobody. He could be plotting some revenge against All Might, but how effective was that going to be when All Might had more than enough time to get over Izuku's death at Kamino? All For One was clingy, but all that did was make Izuku feel vaguely ill in a way he couldn't define. Nothing about All For One made any sense. Nothing. Izuku couldn't even entirely blame his age for it either, not when the rest of All For One's appearance didn't suggest age related deterioration.

It could have been trauma perhaps, but that only made the thoughts swirl faster through his head. What trauma could possibly stick to someone like All For One who viewed human experimentation as a perfectly viable avenue for menacing the public? That was another gap and Izuku felt his head pulse.

Izuku wasn't quite sure at what point the magnitude of the revelation hit him. Maybe it was in All For One's sense of humour. Maybe it was the all too casual manner when they spoke, as if All For One was a visiting volunteer at some exclusive hospital. Maybe it was the

probing, personal questions that made less sense the more Izuku thought about them. Maybe it was the time Izuku, half asleep, caught the fiend taking his time tucking Izuku back into the sheets. Maybe it was everything and his brain had finally recovered from the shock of dying. At this point, Izuku didn't know. He was a passenger along for the ride by the time it hit him.

Izuku's brain came to a logical solution. Izuku felt his lungs seize before anything else, then the chest pains compounded onto his aching, furiously pumping heart and Izuku felt his hands disappear into somewhere without nervous control. Izuku lay there paralysed. Staring. Waiting for the end to come. All in all, Izuku reflected distantly, as if his body currently wasn't in meltdown, it was up there with one of his more severe breakdowns. Not quite as high as his mother crushing his hopes and dreams, but it was there with the best of them. Though if the chest pain kept up, it might even beat it.

Then Izuku froze in true paralysis, a warm hand wrapped around his wrist.

"Izuku, what happened?" All For One had appeared almost out of thin air, as he always did. Search's work Izuku would guess, but from where Izuku had been seen he really couldn't guess. Never too far out of reach. That didn't make any sense either. Izuku's heart sped up as if to spite All For One.

Izuku couldn't begin to respond, even after freed from All For One's death grip. There was too much. It was crushing him.

"Izuku?" All For One was more urgent this time. All that did was make Izuku's heart spasm in a way that made Izuku want to throw up. "Izuku, breathe."

Izuku couldn't. Or didn't want to. There was a difference in there somewhere, not one that he cared enough to think about. His head was too full of other ideas that didn't make any sense that were far more important than breathing slowly or breathing it all. Everyone else already thought he was dead. Dying a second time wasn't going to be much of a problem for anyone.

Izuku remained where he was, still, staring and well beyond the point of a conversation.

Then Izuku seized again, but this time it wasn't him. It didn't do anything to ease Izuku's memory of the racing heart, numb limbs or aching lungs was still there, even if they were masked under layers of

Quirks. They were still there even while All For One tried to hide them, but Izuku's brain wasn't fooled. No movement and feeling didn't mean the sensations themselves had ceased to be present.

"Calm down." There was that urgency again. That unexplained, ever present urgency. One of the contradictions.

From a distance, Izuku felt himself ask a single question. "Why?" Why was he alive? Why did All For One know him? Why wasn't he dead? Why was All For One the way he was when Izuku should have been dead? Why? Why? Why?

"Why?" All For One echoed. Maybe it was in surprise, Izuku couldn't tell. "Why not?" Why not stop chasing All Might? Why not retire? Why not leave Izuku to die? Why not do anything else?

"This doesn't make any sense," Izuku voiced yet again, as he had countless times prior.

"Why does it matter?" It mattered, because it was All For One, who never did anything for free. What was he going to hold over Izuku for "saving" him?

Izuku was struck, as if by lightning, because it did make sense. Only in one respect, but it painted enough of a picture that Izuku's heart resumed beating. "Because you want something," Izuku realised, feeling his heart slow, "and I don't want to give it to you."

The old man's breath caught. "Even if that something is staying alive?" That couldn't be it. It was never that straightforward.

"Why should I? I'm already dead." What was the point? Not when Izuku was never leaving. Not when he was trapped here, feeling himself rot away even while he hobbled from one point to another. Not with the with pains in his chest. There was more to it than a wound on his back and neither of his captors were giving much away. There was also no guarantee that All For One hadn't already made another attempt on All Might. No evidence that All Might was safe and in one piece. Staying here was prolonging something worse than death.

"That's a terrible thing to say, Izuku." Reproach. There was no amusement, no hint of anything positive, like he was taken aback by the statement.

"But it's true." Izuku was already dead as far as everyone else was

concerned. What difference would it make to anyone if he died a second time here?

“No, it’s not,” All For One refuted with cutting edge. “It’s the furthest idea from the truth.”

He didn’t have the right to tell Izuku that; who did he think he was after he killed Izuku in the first place? Izuku clenched his fists, feeling his nails slice into his hands. Not that there was much flesh left on them, but still enough to bleed. So Izuku looked down and All For One was forgotten.

There were punctures in his hand. And Izuku really meant *were*, because before his eyes they were closing up. As if he was… regenerating. Regenerating just like the first Noumu.

“What,” Izuku said slowly and hollowly, “did you do to me?” *How? When? Why?*

For the first time since Izuku had woken up, All For One was at a true loss for words. Pulling away, giving Izuku much needed breathing space, then it was gone as he lunged forwards, scooping Izuku up into his arms.

“Perhaps showing you will help,” All For One finally said after what had to be minutes of delay. Izuku didn’t resist being carried, his IV being tugged along with them and his head still stuck on Regeneration. Regeneration that wasn’t strong enough to power through the wound on his back. Regeneration that couldn’t handle the pain.

All For One walked. This time a longer route, down a corridor Izuku hadn’t seen before, to a bathroom Izuku hadn’t seen before. It had a floor length mirror and Izuku stared, his pale, scarred face reflecting back in all its glory. Scars Izuku couldn’t feel even though they were clearly present.

“What… did… you do?” Izuku whispered reaching up to the wounds he couldn’t feel.

“Many, many things, Izuku. None of which you will approve of.” Stilted. Toneless.

“Why… why didn’t the other wound heal? How?” How was Izuku still functional with another Quirk crammed into his head?

“I never gave you a Quirk,” All For One explained, gesturing to Izuku’s shoulders which had similar scars after the fabric was pulled away. “There’s a Quirk enhancing drug called-”

“-Trigger,” Izuku finished with mounting horror. Trigger was illegal in Japan. Trigger wasn’t illegal in China or America. Trigger that made people aggressive and lose their sense of reason. Trigger that could cause permanent deformities. Trigger… that was most likely being used in the Noumu. Trigger that was being used on him.

“Of course you know about it,” All For One murmured under his breath but well within Izuku’s earshot. “What you don’t know is that Trigger does more than enhance Quirks.”

“What did you do?” Izuku repeated, feeling that same tension from before mounting again.

“We made a… discovery,” All For One whispered from above. “During our field tests with Quirks and Trigger we discovered that an injection or transfusion of blood from one Quirk holder to another would temporarily grant the Quirk.” Level and almost soothing, All For One carried on while the wounds in Izuku’s hand were continuing to inch their way shut before Izuku’s eyes.

Why did it have to be the people who conducted human experiments? Why couldn’t it be anyone else who intervened?

“It was an accident,” All For One almost seemed to confess. “An entirely incidental discovery. One of our testers injected herself with blood and Trigger from one of our subjects. She, in turn, temporarily developed the Quirk of the subject without me ever touching him or her.” Shrugging, the old man continued. “There was some strain of a foreign Quirk placed upon her body, but she never developed the associated cognitive problems… In all practicality, it’s nearly a useless discovery…”

“Unless you wanted to give someone a Quirk without the side effects of your Quirk…” Izuku breathed, trembling. All For One was too close. Too close. Too close for someone who’d experimented on him. Too close.

“More specifically, to give an involuntary Quirk that functions regardless of the consciousness of the holder,” All For One gently added, not so much hesitating as stepping carefully with every word. “Even with your heart restarted, the rest of your organs were in a state of failure… so we elected to… improvise…”

Izuku's jaw sagged open. "You didn't…" Of course All For One did. He wasn't going to let a minor thing like patient consent get in the way of him doing whatever he wanted. Not when the patient was too dead to give consent.

"I did," All For One flatly stated. The lack of an apology was refreshing, as if part of the mask had finally been peeled away. "The doctor restarted your heart and gave you a cocktail of Trigger and suitable donor Quirks to promote healing."

Far too sterile and lacking in detail for Izuku's liking. Instead, Izuku licked his very dry lips while hanging in All For One's arms above the floor. "Which Quirks, exactly and which donors?"

"Numerous Regeneration Quirks, all stacked, but even then we had to be careful. If they were too fast it wouldn't allow for any surgical corrections in the ongoing healing process." Delicate, but short. As if he didn't want to dwell on the idea of healing occurring too fast… But All For One could be speaking from his own person experience. Why wouldn't a Regeneration Quirk heal someone back to their base state automatically? Was there some other criteria that had to be met.

That rose another question."Who were the donors?" Whose life did All For One ruin to keep Izuku alive? What multiple lives had been ruined?

Silence. A frown. An uncomfortable shift. Only then did Izuku have his answer.

"I'm the donor," All For One whispered and Izuku furiously craned his head to focus his unblinking eyes on his archnemesis. Craned his head while the world swayed around him. "We had no way of knowing if you'd be able to handle that many simultaneously operating Quirks even with Trigger as a buffer. I held the combination from the nameless people I took them from and allowed genetic material to be taken to be added to the Trigger. Even then, the Trigger amount interacted poorly with your healing brain and you clawed at your eyes out in a fit of aggression." Why give his own blood? Why prioritise that when no one else Izuku knew of warranted personal attention?

This was too much. Far too much. Too invasive. Izuku had already died young once because of All For One. If it happened a second time it was definitely going to be his fault then as well. This was beyond mere stress. It was beyond his brain's currently expanded holding capacity. All For One was directly responsible for this - for all of it!

“You…” Izuku stated. Then he stopped. What could even be said here? “You’re completely insane,” Izuku instead finished, feeling desperately dissatisfied.“Where do I even start?” Where could he start while a cocktail of Trigger and All For One’s own Quirk healed his hands before his eyes?

“At the beginning?” All For One suggested and Izuku lashed out before he could think, landing a fist into All For One’s unresisting shoulder. All For One who didn’t even flinch.

“You don’t get to say that,” Izuku snapped at him. “Why wasn’t there a rejection from the blood?” All For One’s blood. His murderer’s blood. Izuku wanted to gag on his own tongue. Why was Izuku still alive while these two men stitched Izuku back together, piece by piece? How was he still here?

“Reactions typically require an immune system to react with.” Oh nononononono. It was a shopping list. A shopping list of horrors that All For One was ticking off, one by one, like he was having teeth pulled. Could someone even suppress that sort of reaction? Conventional medicine definitely couldn’t do that. Conventional medicine couldn’t transfer Quirks either. What were these people doing?

“Why?” This was causing Izuku more pain than his panic attack. Why couldn’t All For One be a normal criminal with normal motives?

“If it makes you feel any better, the good doctor’s public career has evaporated due to your care needs.” That was meant to be reassuring, but Izuku wasn’t going to reward his captor with any sort of positive response. Even if Tsubasa deserved to be removed from contact with other human beings.

Izuku took a very deep breath. “Is there any part of my biology you haven’t violated?” His voice was quivering, but that didn’t matter. Even Kacchan wouldn’t handle this type of news gracefully. Was there anything All For One and Tsubasa hadn’t done?

“The most important one,” All For One nodded, his lips quirking slightly upwards. “We did our best to preserve your brain.” Preserved a brain in a wreck of a stitched together body that didn’t function without a wish and a prayer. Why did that sound so familiar?

“After you dosed it with a boatload of drugs,” Izuku faintly corrected. This was too much. But drugs had their own problems. Well known problems that applied to all drugs. “Don’t… drugs eventually wear off if you keep using them?”

“Yes, Izuku. Eventually you will become immune to Trigger,” All For One spoke so softly Izuku was straining to hear him. “Right now the Quirks maintain your heart, but none of the vital organs beyond the liver are designed to regenerate, nor am I willing to risk giving you the true Quirks to test their effects on you…” What was it that made Izuku too important to damage at a cognitive level? “Either way… the outcome would be much the same, even if I personally think the latter would be worse.”

Then… then Izuku’s heart would keep deteriorating. Trigger would wear off, the Quirks would fade… and… and…

“I’m dying.” It was simple. All For One had only bought Izuku time, not saved him. The fussing, the constant attention, the constant dissuasion to use One For All… the constant lookout for when Izuku’s fragile organs finally failed him. The jigsaw puzzle was clearer. Why further stress an already stressed and damaged heart? Not that All For One could have known about Izuku’s established disposition. Maybe Izuku didn’t worry like his mother did, but he didn’t need to when things like this were happening on a daily basis.

“Yes, Izuku, and for that I’m sorry.” The worst part was that he sounded it as well. Remorseless monsters, Izuku could understand, could get over, but this was too wrapped in emotion to be anything but some kind of remorse? Regret? It came back down to those missing nuggets of information that Izuku needed to understand, to plan, to work out why All For One was such a mystery. It was more painful than his years of hunting down the online scraps he could find on All Might’s Quirk. At least he eventually got an answer from All Might.

“I don’t know why you’re bothering.” This was too much effort for ninety nine percent of doctors, let alone Tsubasa who was styling mad scientist more than anyone else Izuku could recollect in recent villain history. Even Recovery Girl wouldn’t have tried her luck with a corpse.

“As it is, my circumstances are much the same as yours. What cures you will cure me.” Izuku would be perfectly happy if neither of them were cured and All For One’s career was permanently laid to rest before he ruined anyone else’s life. From what Izuku had been told though, Izuku would fade long before All For One who could hang on that little bit longer due to his arsenal.

“Self-interest, then?” Always a safe bet.

“There’s only one of you, Izuku. There won’t be another you.” Okay, maybe not an entirely safe bet. What did that even mean? There would always be more people like Izuku. There was nothing special about Izuku in particular and All For One was fanciful if he thought otherwise.

“You keep saying that…” They were moving again, down another unfamiliar hall, through another doorway.

“Because it’s true.” No, it wasn’t.

“You’re going to outlive me anyway.” And All For One was going to outlive just about everyone with his self inflicted Longevity Quirk(s). His minions, his experiments, his brother, the rest of his family already. He had already or would outlive everyone. It was a wonder why he bothered at all with trying to micromanage a society where everything he knew would one day die with or without All Might’s interference. He could wait for all of his problems to fade away.

“All the more reason to make sure you last to old age,” All For One replied without missing a beat.

“That’s not something I want to hear after what you just told me.” At least All For One wouldn’t be able to sustain any plan to permanently keep Izuku with him. Trigger would eventually wear off and there was nothing All For One could do to stop that. In light of the circumstances, Izuku was going to soak up the relief he could from the very knowledge that he wouldn’t have to live with it forever. It was a matter of time. All he had to do was wait.

“Would you prefer more details on the specifics of the surgery, then?” That was definitely meant to be sarcastic, but the joke was on All For One.

“Can I read the notes?” What other drugs was he being given?

“You don’t want to.” On second thoughts, Izuku could live without knowing what percentage of All For One was tethering him to life.

Ultimately, Izuku found himself relocated to yet another room, perched on a couch, pinned to All For One’s side while the latter disparagingly flicked through the news channels on a television. Izuku was expecting to be dumped back into his usual room while All For One slunk off to dodge more questions. This was different. Was it an apology in whatever archaic language All For One spoke? Or rather, an attempt to remove the strain from Izuku’s ailing heart with

whatever trash that could be found to distract him?

There was numbness. Nothing but numbness. Izuku wondered how long it'd take before the reality of this revelation truly hit him, like the others had earlier.

“Absolutely worthless,” All For One scathing directed to one news reporter who was stumbling through their report.

But Izuku saw something through the rapid bites of sound and colour. A familiar flicker of yellow.

“Wait, go back three!”

And All For One did. Izuku held his breath.

It settled on a plain man in a navy suit. But that wasn’t what caught Izuku’s eye. It was the blond standing off to the man’s right. There was no colourful suits, no smile of reassurance, no gestures. All Might was a shadow lurking behind the others in similar uniformed suits, his hands tucked neatly behind his back.

“This is new,” All For One commented. If he had an eyebrow to lift, Izuku was sure he would have seen it shoot upwards. “He isn’t smiling. Since when has All Might been posing as a police officer?”

Izuku helplessly shrugged, transfixed.

“I will now turn this over to Detective Yagi, the lead investigator in the disappearance of Izuku Midoriya,” the man speaking finished.

“Thank you, sir,” All Might’s skeletal voice carried through the microphone all the way to Izuku and All For One. “As previously outlined, we have reason to believe that Izuku Midoriya is still alive.”

To the contrary, “Detective Yagi” might not have been smiling, but nonetheless gave the impression of a grinning, saltwater crocodile lying in wait for the first foot to step on it. The first mistake, the first hint of a clue that gave them away. And it would be for nothing if All For One was telling the truth about the drip that kept Izuku alive.

“And, to think you said no one cared,” All For One tutted.

Izuku couldn’t even bring himself to respond. His heart felt like it was about to give out.

Chapter End Notes

Here we are on the downhill slope.

Attachment

Chapter Summary

Letting go is always the hard part.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Mirio Togata kicked his feet back and forth, like most people did when they were called to the principal's office. Being called unexpectedly, though? Yeah, Mirio couldn't remember if he'd done anything to personally prompt Nedzu's wrath, so it wasn't exactly anxiety. Mirio liked to think he was embodying a healthy dose of apprehension. So when he was finally called in he… didn't quite get what he expected.

"Mirio Togata?" It was a blond skeleton seated in the principal's chair who greeted him, his hands clasped tightly in front of him. The principal himself was waving from the man's shoulder.

"Yes, sirs," Mirio replied with more urgency. "That's me. How can I help?" He had to be here for a reason. UA wasn't the sort of school to be randomly dragging students out of class. Any class really, and Mirio had been yanked out of a practical as soon as his feet hit the ground. He was not anxious. He wasn't.

It didn't help Mirio's butterflies when the skeleton's face dropped into a frown. "It's the other way around, Mr Togata. I'm here to help you."

Mirio stared. "Uh, with what, sir?" Sir Nightyeye was already helping Mirio as far as his pro hero work was going and whoever the skeleton was, he didn't look like an academic or teaching sort. The navy suit smelt like law enforcement. So did the slicked back hair and pocket full of pens.

The principal coughed. "Mr Togata, this is Detective Yagi of the police." The mouse waved an entirely unnecessary paw in the direction of the stern faced skeleton. "During his investigation of Izuku Midoriya's disappearance, a piece of previously unknown information came to his attention." Okay, Mirio could feel it properly now. Now it was anxiety.

"I can see from the expression on your face that you're imagining the

worst," Yagi noted, "but it's not quite what you're imagining. Indeed, I doubt you've even noticed it." Mirio nodded, with nothing internal having changed. "But, to the topic at hand." Mirio held his breath. "It has come to the awareness of the police and the Hero Public Safety Commission that your mentor for your pro hero internship has been less than honest with the authorities." The skeleton said it all in one large breath. One large breath that felt like it left Mirio's lungs instead of Yagi's by the time he was done talking. What.

Mirio blinked. Then he blinked again. "Sir Nighteye… dishonest?" The words didn't sound right. Sir had high and exacting standards for paperwork and reports to authorities. He was a stickler for the rules. "That doesn't sound right." Yagi's expression hadn't changed, but Mirio soldiered on. "Wouldn't you have found it when he first applied for his teaching licence?"

Immediately, Yagi's expression immediately morphed in something less pointy. "We couldn't possibly have known about this until after he took you on as a student."

Mirio winced. "I don't want to be rude, but I don't understand what happened…" How could someone be dishonest with a teaching licence? Background checks were mandatory in every job, but having even the slightest blemish was enough to have people kicked off the teaching register. That meant Sir did something recently for it to be found… and that something involved Mirio. Nope, he was not breathing heavily. He was absolutely fine.

"Shall we start at the beginning, then?" Yagi nodded and Mirio haphazardly nodded back. "Sir Nighteye was chosen by All Might as a sidekick some years ago."

Mirio nodded again. He knew this part. Sir had begged All Might for the opportunity.

"For the most part, Sir Nighteye undertook intelligence gathering and bureaucratic tasks within the agency." Yep, that was in line with how Sir ran his own agency. "He wasn't usually physically involved in the day to day criminal elements that All Might dealt with as part of his schedule."

Cocking his head, Mirio frowned. "Uh, sir, how do you know about this?"

Yagi grinned and Nedzu himself seemed to chuckle from the man's shoulder. "I was All Might's secretary for a number of years. It would

have been quite a trick for me to miss those details."

Contrary to Mirio's expectations, that just made the roiling bubble in his stomach feel so much worse. All Might's own former staff were the ones who made the report to the police. A random member of the public was one thing. Having a former employer turn you in was an entirely different kettle of fish.

"What Sir Nighteye neglected to tell you is that there's more to being connected to All Might than smiles and a well paid job saving people," Yagi stated over his cup of tea. Mirio felt his own toes twitch from the weight in that sentence. "He never told you why All Might refused to take on sidekicks, did he?"

Mirio stiffly shook his head from side to side. Why would All Might not take sidekicks… unless…

"All Might made many enemies." Yagi almost seemed to mind read with the perfect timing of the answer. "The most vicious and the longest held feud was between him and All For One, the villain who destroyed Kamino." Yagi sipped lightly at his tea. Sipped lightly, while the teacup shook in Yagi's hand. That wasn't… a good thing. All For One. Mirio would remember that name.

"Did…" Mirio swallowed. "Did All For One target people All Might knew?" That was pretty common with pro heroes. So many enemies and not enough days in the week to deal with them.

"Yes, he did," Yagi bluntly stated and Mirio felt a blow to his stomach. "He killed All Might's adoptive mother and threatened many others. The students of 1-A were recently targeted because of this feud and All For One's lacking humanity." A blow that only tore more wind out of Mirio's sails the longer Yagi spoke. All For One was behind the attacks on UA then. All Might being a teacher was why All For One targeted UA.

Mirio clenched his fists, feeling his trousers bunch up below his hands. "Then why…" Why did Sir want Mirio to be a student under All Might? Sir had to know what happened. Sir would have been one of All For One's targets, right?

"Because Sir Nighteye has spent too many years using his Quirk instead of his common sense." Mirio flinched from the the sharpness. "Sir Nighteye forecasted All Might's death going on seven years ago. If Sir's forecasts were in any way accurate, All Might would have died during the conflict in Kamino." Clipped, blunt, indifferent. Contempt

only thinly veiled through the sipping of Yagi's tea. "Sir Nighteye's suggestion was unhelpful to say the least. But he pushed the point anyway and a falling out occurred between them."

There was no way he should be asking this, but if Yagi was blowing it open anyway, Mirio may as well have the full story. "What… what was Sir suggesting?"

"He wanted All Might to retire and undertake a full-time successor who would then become the Symbol of Peace." Yagi waved a hand. "The problem with this undertaking is that All Might would have been weakened by an early retirement. Eventually, when All For One was exposed, All Might would have been rendered helpless by his complacency and lack of practice and killed." Yagi spoke almost robotically. "Sir's suggestion would have contributed directly to All Might's death."

Jaw hanging open, Mirio couldn't speak. "But…" But what? What could Mirio even say to that? "But how could Sir have known All Might would be killed by All For One?"

"All Might's prospective death isn't the worry here, Mr Togata." Yagi gently sat his tea down and leant forwards. "The worry is that All For One would have immediately targeted you and had you killed for any link to All Might. That's something Sir Nighteye easily should have been able to infer given All For One's reprehensible behaviour in prior years."

Mirio swallowed heavily, his mouth dry.

"I take it that Sir Nighteye never told you about All For One and his propensity for serial killing?" Yagi was lifting the teacup yet again.

Dumbly, Mirio shook his head. There hadn't even been whispers of All Might being involved in such a long running feud. This was the first he'd heard about it. Sir Nighteye was a huge All Might fanboy, but to keep this detail to himself…

"Sir Nighteye has been extremely irresponsible with your safety, as a result," Nedzu piped in. "We of course weren't aware of the extent of these dangers until recently, when your last patrol route with Sir Nighteye was raised."

Thinking back, Mirio could only think of one patrol route that met that description. "Uh, do you mean the one near Sir's agency?"

“The one where you encountered Kai Chisaki on patrol,” Yagi added.

Mirio felt his eyes glaze over. Kai Chisaki… “Oh, you mean Overhaul?” The yakuza with the beak mask and the little girl… Not that there was any proof of wrongdoing yet. He wasn’t formally considered a villain according to Sir.

“He’s also a serial killer,” Yagi said so bluntly Mirio nearly fell through his chair. “If Sir Nighteye thought otherwise, he was incapable of staying up to date with current police and pro hero intel. Students are required to be supervised by their supervisor or an affiliate of the agency. You were sent off alone and encountered someone who very well could have killed you with the correct provocation.”

Now Mirio’s skin was crawling. Sir couldn’t have known that Mirio was going to run in Chisaki. “But, Sir Nighteye couldn’t-”

“That’s irrelevant, Mr Togata. He has a duty of care bestowed upon him by UA to ensure your safety while you undertake your internship.” There was a chill that sped through the room, Yagi’s already darkened eyes darkening further. “It has been discovered through our investigations that Sir Nighteye attempted to expedite you into All Might’s role as the Symbol of Peace without any consideration for your age, your studies or the dangers you would face with such an association. That includes sending you on unsupervised and quite frankly dangerous patrols and situations you should not have been exposed to as a student.” Yagi’s scowl deepened further still. “We can only be thankful that All For One never took Sir Nighteye’s attempts to replace All Might as a serious threat, otherwise I doubt you would still be here to have this conversation.”

Quick and shallow, Mirio’s breaths were coming fast. “But…” Sir Nighteye meant well.

“I understand this is difficult for you to grasp, Mr Togata,” Nedzu solemnly offered. “But this was something that we at UA missed until Detective Yagi brought it to our attention. On behalf of the school, I apologise for the dangers that you were exposed to due to our failure to investigate Sir Nighteye’s unexplained interest in your studies.” Nedzu forced out his apology in one huge gasp of air. “Naturally, we will extend this explanation and apology to your parents. Even the mere prospect of danger is unacceptable after what happened to Mr Midoriya.” There he was again. The missing boy, who might not be missing after all. Everything came back down to Midoriya.

“He couldn’t have known about all of these things,” Mirio frantically inserted.

“Yes, he could,” Yagi stated unsympathetically. “He has Clairvoyance, Mr Togata. His refusal to make the best of his Quirk does not help his defence.”

Mirio was thrown. What else could he say?

“I realise you’re attached to your teacher, but it still doesn’t justify his recklessness towards you as student.” But he wasn’t reckless! “Did Sir Nighteye ever take you through the emergency procedures in case you were to encounter someone of Kai Chisaki’s status?”

Here Mirio slammed into a brick wall. “Uhhh…” Blank. It was just blank. No, Mirio didn’t remember having any discussions about that particular topic…

“Yes, that’s what we suspected.” Yagi frowned. “It’s manifestly irresponsible to send a student into prospective danger with no backup plan should something go awry. This leads us to the final point to be made during this meeting.” Nonononono, not yet! There had to be some other way. This wasn’t happening.

“We, and that includes UA administration, the police and Hero Public Safety Commission, have decided to revoke Sir Nighteye’s teaching accreditation. He will have to undergo a period of supervision and retraining before he is able to take on students again.”

Mirio perked up. All he had to do was wai-

“-I’m not done yet, Mr Togata,” Yagi smoothly interjected into Mirio’s thoughts. “Even should he complete these tasks in a timely manner, he has already proven to have an unhealthy fixation and overestimation of your abilities.” Mirio deflated like a popped balloon. “He will not be permitted to either take you on as a student or as a sidekick due to his questionable behaviours concerning your education.” Heavy with finality, Mirio felt like an anchor was being dropped around his neck.

“That’s unfair!” He hadn’t meant to shout. It sort of just slipped out. He was going to lose his internship because of-of- of whatever they were accusing Sir Nighteye of?

“This is no slight on you Mr Togata,” Nedzu reinserted himself. “You’re free to pick another pro hero with teaching credentials to intern under. We at UA will happily facilitate such a transfer. Sir

Nighteye's agency simply won't be on that list."

What did he think? Mirio still didn't believe that Sir Nighteye could be so reckless. Weren't the other pro heroes like this and his mind chipped away at the idea, but as the seconds passed he wasn't coming any closer to answer.

"I'm sorry it came to this, Mr Togata." Shockingly, Yagi did sound genuinely apologetic in a way that seemed beyond most bureaucrats. "But your safety as a student comes before Sir Nighteye's lofty ambitions to one up All Might. You are free to leave now. We will explain the matter to your parents."

Stumblingly, Mirio took to his feet and staggered to the door, feeling more dazed than ever. This wasn't happening. This couldn't be happening.

"This is because of what happened to Midoriya, isn't it?" Mirio asked, halfway out the door.

"We're already failed to recover one student, Mr Togata," Yagi coolly answered. "We'd rather not have to deal with another."

Mirio fled, wondering what had happened to the green haired boy. Wondering how such a savage police detective ended up on the matter of Sir Nighteye's teaching because of that green haired boy. Why did it come back to Midoriya?

There was a cat in his office. It was dressed like a police officer and shedding on his desk. Nighteye cleared his throat. "May I help you?" He really didn't have time for this, not when All Might was still missing and derelict in his duties. Just what was the man thinking to go missing now? All For One was still on the loose and, by all accounts, still abducting people. All Might was needed now more than ever.

Flicking its ears, the cat turned to Nighteye. "You may indeed help me. I have paperwork to serve you with." Another ear flick. "And to answer any questions you have since I'm on the investigation team."

Nighteye rolled his eyes. "Who exactly are you to barge into my office in such a mirthless manner?" Another time waster from the police. For some minor investigation no doubt.

“I am Officer Tamakawa. The Hero Public Safety Commission and the police are acting jointly in this matter and dispatched me to serve this paperwork on you.” Tamakawa face hadn’t changed. He merely slapped down a huge, eye watering wad of papers from his briefcase onto Nighteye’s desk without so much as a blink.

The words finally registered. “The Hero Public Safety Commission? What could I have possibly done to draw their ire?” And the police as well. The police rarely investigated pro hero conduct, so why was a low level officer here now, providing paperwork? This wasn’t standard procedure.

“In relation to the revocation of your teaching permissions, Sir Nighteye,” Tamakawa blinked at Nighteye. “You have been deemed to be of an unfit character for the purpose of teaching pro hero students by a joint taskforce of both the police and Hero Public Safety.”

“Unfit character?” Nighteye barked, marching to his desk and hurling himself down behind it. “How dare they, I’ve followed every rule to the letter!”

The cat shrugged. “Not according to our investigations you haven’t.”

“What investigation could there have been to strip me from teaching?” Instructing Mirio was more vital than ever now, with All Might so clearly on the decline. Who was going to be the Symbol of Peace? All Might’s candidate wasn’t in the running anymore, just as Nighteye had expected to happen. Izuku Midoriya had been crushed to death by a building and taken One For All with him. If Nighteye didn’t do something, All For One would once again have free rein.

Flinging open the pages to the contents, Nighteye paled.

There were the reasons, neatly dot pointed down the page.

Failure to disclose.

Failure to implement a safe evacuation plan

Failure to take due diligence while caring for a minor.

Failure to set age appropriate tasks for a child of school age.

Failure to notify the Hero Public Safety Commission of a conflict of interest.

Failure to behave appropriately in front of non-intern Heroics students.

And on it went. For another *four pages*.

It was as though someone had leapt into Nighteye's past with a scouring brush and violently belted out every conceivable piece of dirt Nighteye could or ever would have against his name. Then, after their pile of dirt had been collected, they had neatly itemised it on a report for an effective viewing experience. Nighteye couldn't even place the blame on a lawyer, such was the level of detail as he thumbed through each page. Lawyers relied on witness testimony and submissions, whoever the investigator was had gone to the effort of digging up years old complaints and even brand new complaints, only months old. Every ounce of data, gather, compiled, reported on with expert testimony, submitted and approved.

It was a monster of a document, meticulously crafted and somehow approved through the bureaucracy in such scant few months that Nighteye felt a swell of admiration for whoever compiled it. And it had Sir Nighteye almost cheerfully stamped across the front of it, in big, bold letters, revoking his teaching permissions.

Nighteye wasn't sure if he should crumple it up in a fit of rage or send a letter of congratulations to the author.

"Why?" Nighteye instead bit at Tamakawa.

"I believe the report comprehensively outlines the why," Tamakawa hummed back, absentmindedly flicking through his phone. His catty facial features giving nothing away.

"How about a summary since it's such a monumentally long document?" It was going to take hours for Nighteye to read through this monstrosity.

"Your intern was almost killed by Kai Chisaki due to your poor instruction and lack of direct supervision," Tamakawa answered, not looking up from his phone. "He's lucky to be alive after encountering that man in an alleyway. Upon investigating this, we found other close call incidents you saw fit to send your student into without adequate safety precautions. As such, the Hero Public Safety Commission, with assisting investigations from the police, chose to revoke your teaching licence. You can't be trusted with the responsibility." Tamakawa may as well have been reading a milk label for all of the interest he showed in the conclusion. "You have thirty days to appeal the decision, but I don't think you're going to have much luck."

“Not much luck? I was a sidekick to All Might!” Nighteye hissed across the desk. “Who could possibly make such a recommendation in light of that?”

“Investigating officer signed off on the report, sir. See for yourself.” If there was anything that vexed Nighteye, it was the apathy he was witnessing from this police officer right now.

Instead, he did as he was told. Only then, upon reaching the final page of the teaching permit revocation did Nighteye see the supervising officer for the investigation. The detective responsible for this farce.

Detective Yagi.

Signed with a familiar flourish that Nighteye knew all too well.

“Do you have any questions?” Tamakawa’s ears flicked again and Nighteye resisted the urge to bundle up the paperwork and hurl into into the bin.

This wasn’t happening. It couldn’t be happening.

“Why him?” No no no no.

“As All Might’s personal secretary, it was mutually decided between all of the investigating authorities that his experience and knowledge of your operating procedures made him the most qualified in handing this decision.”

“This is a conflict of interest!” Nighteye spat back. How dare All Might use their work together against him! What was he thinking? Playing policeman while the world burned! This is why Mirio was needed!

“No it’s not. By all accounts you had few to no dealings with All Might’s personal secretary. As a former employer though, his performance and reviews of your conduct provided the required insight to strike at the motivation behind your conduct. You’re also forbidden from contacting Mirio Togata until as such time the Hero Public Safety Commission deems it appropriate.” Leaning back into his chair, Tamakawa made unflinching eye contact. “You’re free to discuss the matter with Detective Yagi. In the meantime, I have other places to be. Good day to you.” Tamakawa left without another word, leaving a shaking Nighteye behind him.

Oh, Nighteye would indeed be having words with *Detective Yagi* about this farce of a document.

There was Izuku's photo on the screen behind All Might. There were contact numbers websites for any sighting. There were cash rewards. They were looking for him. They were looking for All For One. They were all going to die.

Izuku couldn't breathe.

"It's okay, Izuku." Izuku was still pinned to All For One. All For One who was the only reason why Izuku couldn't feel the debilitating pain of his organs failing. All For One who caused this in the first place.

"No it's not, I'm dying anyway!" Izuku gasped out. "Why? How do they know I'm still alive?" The images were still scrolling, but All For One was tugging a clawing Izuku closer again.

"Educated guesswork, I would expect. If the Noumu can live in spite of their modifications, there's no reason why you who was so speedily recovered can't be recalled back from death." Unrepentant as ever.

"But you didn't call me be back from death, I'm still dying!" Why should he be calm? This was All For One's fault! How many people were going to die looking for him?

"For as long as your heart beats, there's hope for a permanent solution." Serene. Too serene for such a disturbing statement.

Izuku wanted to pull at his hair, but his arms were trapped by his side. "Hope? Why would you even do this to someone in the first place?" All Might was still talking in the background, but Izuku had heard all of this before… in countless other searches that were televised for missing people. Sick. He felt sick. Guts heaving, his mouth dry, there wasn't enough air.

"There's only one you, Izuku," All For One pointed out, "and your rarity shouldn't be underestimated." Rarity? What did rarity have to do with keeping dead people alive? All For One already outlived everyone around him. Any attempt to have people last to his age was fruitless at best and dangerous at worst.

"Rarity? What? Do you collect… people… or something…" Izuku petered out, his anxiety solidly kicked away by a more insidious, creeping emotion. Turning blankly to All For One, he rephrased the question. "Do… do you collect people?" All For One hoarded Quirks… did that same behaviour apply to the people around him? People apart

from All For One had Quirks too…

Almost abashed, All For One finally muttered an answer as the various officials droned on in the background. “I’ve been known to dabble. My brother was rather resistant to the practice and it was meant to keep him alive as well.”

Sagging, Izuku felt the onset of a ferocious headache and an unexplainable sense of deja vu. “Can you not do that?”

“How do I keep people safe if I don’t?” All For One tutted. Keep people safe? Was that what dropping a building on people was called these days?

“By letting them live their lives without you?” Izuku weakly suggested.

“I tried that,” All For One hissed, “and it didn’t work.”

There wasn’t the time to pry deeper into that statement, for a familiar voice in the press conference jumped to the forefront.

“Excuse me, Detective Yagi,” a curt voice leapt out.

“There’s a sneer if ever I heard one,” All For One quipped and Izuku feebly shoved at him in an attempt to better hear the question. It’d been years since Sir Nighteye and All Might had been in a press conference together! Izuku’s worries didn’t quite take a step back so much as they were violently evicted from the premises. This was more important.

“Yes, Sir Nighteye?” That… wasn’t very friendly soundly. It was like All Might was greeting an inanimate cactus instead of a person.

“I’m curious as to why so many resources are being poured into the locating of a UA student who, forgive my wording, was crushed to death by a falling building,” Sir Nighteye fired at All Might. “Isn’t time and money better spent on those who survived the incident and their recovery?”

Izuku really couldn’t breathe now, even with All For One patting him on the back. “Oh this is going to be good.” All For One’s own seeming enjoyment of the press conference wasn’t helping either.

“Sir Nighteye, I find it difficult to accept any legitimacy in your concerns.” All Might sounded light and affable, but there wasn’t any

sign of a smile. In Izuku's experience, if All Might wasn't smiling, running away was an extremely good idea. But no, Sir Nighteye still seemed to be there, because All Might's eyes weren't tracking an object sprinting away. "After all, you were recently disciplined and your teaching registration was struck out after you weren't found to be managing your intern in a safe and competent manner."

Izuku felt his mouth fall open and All For One began to shake with violent mirth. "See?" Oh, Izuku could see alright. That didn't mean he had any idea what caused this public argument in the first place.

"That is a personal matter between me and-"

"-Not when you're on a public register," All Might coldly interrupted Sir Nighteye. "You are a public servant and the status of your registration is available to the public for matters of transparency. If you wish to conceal such information from interested citizens, you've chosen the wrong path of employment." Absolute savagery. All Might was eating Sir Nighteye alive on national television without a single shred of remorse.

"My employment requires that limited resources be spent in an effective manner," Sir Nighteye snapped back.

"Your resources weren't being well spent when you almost killed your student by failing to provide an exit strategy for A rank villain encounters," All Might fairly snarled back and gasps shot through the crowd. Sir Nighteye did what? What was going on at Nighteye's agency? More than ever, Izuku felt those missing months.

Darting back and forth between All Might and Sir Nighteye, Izuku's jaw was sagging ever lower. "When did these two end up so… hostile to each other?" Something he asked more from himself than All For One. Yes, it was known that Sir Nighteye had left All Might's agency, but nobody reported on whatever was happening here. Certainly, nothing this vicious had ever been reported. The tabloids would have wept as this news descended from the heavens to fill their news cycle for the next three months.

"Ah, now that is something I can tell you about." Not that it mattered if Izuku only asked himself, when All For One was waiting in the wings to leap into action anyway like a gossiping old woman. Candid and dripping with glee as the two former colleagues exchanged volleys. "There's been some, shall we say friction, between All Might and his sidekick for quite some time now." Any delicacy in that

wording launched itself clean out the nearest window in favour of All For One's dripping glee. "All Might refused to retire and Sir desperately wanted All Might to pass One For All on to the next generation." All For One paused, his mouth splitting into a grin. "I guess I don't need to tell you what a mistake Sir Nighteye's suggestion would have been." Izuku didn't even stop to wonder about where All For One possibly could have heard that from. The man was stalking everyone at UA as it was, it wasn't new at this point. Disturbing, certainly, but not new.

Izuku nodded slowly. A falling out made sense. Sir Nighteye's departure from All Might's agency always had that air of mystery floating around it. Tabloids gobbled it up, but still had nothing to show for it years later. "What exactly happened?" If it was a dispute over succession, then naturally there wouldn't be anything to find. One For All still, thankfully, wasn't common knowledge enough and nor was All Might's injury. All For One wasn't giving any secrets to the public either which made the possibility of anyone finding out even lower.

"The sidekick wanted a perfect clone of All Might, from what I heard in the grapevine. All Might's own desires mattered little to the fanboy who watched his pedestal shatter, then wanted a shiny new number one hero to take his place." All For One's feral grin was still stretching, ever wider. "He wasn't quiet about it either, bragging about Togata's capabilities as though he were already the next coming of All Might. And naturally, "All For One shrugged, "that nugget of information made its way straight back to me. We'd have been seeing a very different piece of news coverage if All Might hadn't stumbled across you. Indeed… you even saved his life."

Izuku craned his head to fix his sight on All For One smirk. "What was Sir Nighteye trying to do?" What exactly did a "perfect clone" mean to someone like All For One?

"Sir Nighteye hunted down All Might's less intelligent doppelgänger, a boy by the name of Mirio Togata. He's a third year at your school." There was a hissing sibilance in All For One's voice that made Izuku squirm within the man's arms. "I heard whispers that All Might was meant to teach at UA the year before the one he started and prepared myself for it… but it never eventuated after he failed to arrive. So I was curious and did enough digging to find that Mirio Togata had never met All Might and nor did All Might have anything to do with the inept second year. Instead, All Might delayed his appearance entirely… almost as if he had something better to do. And that takes

us to you, Izuku." Here the smile fell from All For One. "You were the cause of that delay."

Of course there was a delay. If All Might was teaching at UA, he wouldn't have had the time to drill Izuku to get him ready for not only One For All, but the entry exam. If Izuku hadn't held onto All Might that faithful day…

"If Mirio Togata had received that Quirk, he wouldn't have lived long enough to use it," All For One deployed with the same indifference as a nuclear warhead pitching towards the ground. "You receiving the Quirk instead saved his life." Then, almost fondly, Japan's most experienced mass murderer continued. "I don't hold restraints for Togata that I do you, even if he was as much an unknowing party in the matter as you were." Honestly, Izuku would have been more comfortable with All For One detailing plans for Izuku's own involuntary exit strategy from life than Togata's. Hearing someone so cordially admit their prospective plans for the murder of a child was beyond words.

More troubling than All For One's statement itself, though, was the implication behind it. The only people who knew about All Might's possible plans at UA were UA staff and UA teachers specifically. There's no way All For One could have known about All Might's intention to teach without someone embedded in UA. Someone who knew All Might's teaching schedule for the USJ. Someone who didn't know 1-A's Quirks. Someone who knew where everyone was at the camp. That didn't leave a lot of options. "You have a spy at UA, don't you?" Izuku shot out without thinking.

"You're a clever boy, Izuku." Perking up, Izuku had the impression that the centuries old monster was far happier about this discovery of Izuku's than he had any right to be. "So I do."

"Someone who knew about the USJ and camp," Izuku muttered. All For One was eagerly nodding, like he was watching a contestant on a quiz show. "But they didn't know about our Quirks at the USJ, so it can't be anyone from 1-A." No, Kurogiri tossing Asui into the water was enough indication that they spy didn't know about the Quirks… not yet. "It's someone from 1-B isn't it?" Still smirking, All For One's predatory smirk grew larger. "Ragdoll was targeted first and none of the students…" Knew anything about about the event that was planned. And only two teachers from UA were at that event and it couldn't have been Aizawa… None of the students in 1-B had anything optimised for spying, which left someone who had a direct source.

“It’s Vlad King, isn’t it?” Izuku asked.

Without warning, Izuku’s hair was violently unsettled, All For One’s hands carding through it. Izuku leapt into the air even while restrained. “And there you are working out my entire scheme at UA with only a handful of clues.” That was a misleading statement if Izuku ever heard one. Vlad King was doing more than giving away camp locations and Izuku couldn’t do anything to notify UA.

“Does UA know yet?” Izuku instead pushed, valiantly attempting to ignore All Might and Sir Nighteye’s screaming match on the television. He had to control the impulse. This was more important. This was how All For One was one step ahead of UA.

“If UA does know anything, King hasn’t mentioned it.” All For One shrugged. Shrugged like losing his key spy didn’t matter anymore. Then again, maybe King didn’t matter if All For One had already taken what he needed from the source. Drawn and discarded. King was quite likely on his own. Had he realised yet? Or was he still obliviously playing to a role where there would be no reward, no escape.

But there was a new, scarier thought with this Detective Yagi identity. All Might played the villain before, numerous times. In fact, his emaciated form was the go to anonymous supervillain in almost all of 1-A’s training. This time though, it was retooled into more than a role. All Might was weaponising it and, without any shame, obliterating the reputation of his former colleague on national television. “If this is what he’s doing now… what’s he done to the League of Villains?” Izuku wondered aloud. What would he do to Vlad King who was the cause of Kacchan’s kidnapping and, indirectly, Izuku’s death?

“You saw how he treated me, Izuku. I wonder if there’s anything left of Tomura and his new found friends.” That… wasn’t a bad point. Right now All Might looked like he was going to unhinge his jaw and snap the head clean off the next person to ask him a stupid question. Right now, that person was Sir Nighteye who still wasn’t getting the clue.

“Izuku, remember what I said about enunciating clearly?” All For One’s comment jolted Izuku back into the reality where Izuku had spoken that thought. “I don’t think you’re wrong though. The last time I saw that expression was during All Might’s attempts to expunge me from reality.”

“He might have access to their interrogations now…” Izuku

murmured.

“He does,” All For One inclined his head. “Tomura’s heart’s been on the verge of giving out quite some time now. Oddly enough, it coincides with whenever All Might enters the same room as him.”

Pausing, Izuku stared at All For One in horror. “And you’re… just letting it happen?” All Might wouldn’t be allowed to physically harm them, but no rule said he couldn’t project an impending sensation of their own demise at them, as All Might had done to Izuku and Kacchan during their exam. Then, all All Might had to do was wait until Shigaraki cracked like an egg. More concerning, All For One knew the whole time it was happening and…?

“It’s not my problem,” All For One shrugged. “I told them to leave.”

“But… aren’t those your minions?” Izuku insisted. Disposable. They were disposable. Just like King, Shigaraki was disposable. What was All For One after?

“Personally, Izuku. Between me and All Might, I think I got the better deal as far as Kamino outcomes are concerned.” Izuku’s head slumped sideways, slamming into All For One’s shoulder. Izuku hoped it left a bruise.

“At least I’m inconveniencing you by still being alive,” Izuku sighed, hoping that every second All For One wasted prying into Izuku’s inevitable fate was time taken away from his other schemes. At this point, it was all that Izuku had left with his broken, piecemeal body. If could he could keep All For One distracted, it was better than doing nothing.

“You’re not an inconvenience, Izuku,” All For One hummed, snaking an arm closer around Izuku still. Izuku couldn’t dispute that All For One had a heart. He could hear it beating right now in a rhythm so different to Izuku’s own. “Indeed,” he said slowly, “it’s been something of a source of… guilt for me that you’re here.”

“Guilt?” Izuku repeated, feebly trying trying to pry All For One’s arm off his own. Since when had All For One ever felt guilt?

“Yes, because contrary to your thoughts, I rather enjoy socialising with you.” Time slowed for Izuku and it crawled along his teeth, along his skin, along his brain. “Your thoughts, your discussions, even your barbs… I think I’ve dwelt on the presence of your Quirk all of once since I brought you here, because compared to the rest of you, it

simply isn't that important in the grander scheme of things." Izuku felt a gentle squeeze of All For One's limbs constrict around him as if it was from a world away. "And I shouldn't enjoy it, because as you raised, I caused your death. I should give you space, but…" All For One frowned here and Izuku's heart skipped a beat. "I don't want to be like everyone else who left you to rot and I like spending time with you." All For One smiled thinly, almost ironically. "Who would have thought these circumstances would have been the closest I came to a vacation in a very long time?"

Izuku left the question hang for a moment, as he tripped through All For One's admission. "You… like…?" Izuku waved a hand at himself generally. All For One liked taking care of a cripple who defied him at every turn? Someone, who with slightly more health, had an opportunity to kill him? Someone who was a student of his archenemy? He liked performing menial tasks for his own murder victim? All For One truly was beyond normal human comprehension. "I don't understand why you would."

"You're not a burden, nor are you an inconvenience," All For One said simply. "Even if you were injured, without a Quirk and entirely helpless, you still wouldn't be a burden." As if to emphasise the point, All For One's hand grazed Izuku's chin in what might have been a caress. A caress that made Izuku's blood run cold and his heart thump uncontrollably.

If All For One was expecting that to be reassuring, then he had gravely miscalculated. If All For One wasn't lying, there was a dangerous prospect that Izuku wouldn't have ever expected. A possibility so far out there and so impossible that Izuku hadn't even considered the risks or consequences of what it meant or how to deal with it. This wasn't meant to happen. It wasn't in any of the manuals or advisories and he hadn't read anything about a situation like this online.

All For One was attached and Izuku had absolutely no idea what he was meant to do about it.

Not that it mattered right now, because Izuku's gaze was drawn to the television. Drawn to Sir Nighteye who was somehow standing, shouting an inch from All Might's face at the podium (when did he climb the stage?). Then, Izuku watched in slow motion as a familiar blond erupted into flames and bounded onto the stage in a single majestic leap. Watched the right arm crank back. Watched it shoot forward and crack across Sir Nighteye's jaw. Sir Nighteye fell limply to the ground. Time resumed. The crowd gasped.

“Keep your hands to your fucking self,” Kacchan howled at the limp body. "And keep your shitplosion about Deku to yourself!" Then he cracked Sir Nighteye across the face again, seemingly for good measure.

“Well,” All For One purred, “I guess he didn’t see that one coming.”

Izuku could only nod dumbly, still without a solution or answer, staring at Kacchan.

It was that time of the week again. Katsuki, gripping his teacup with nearly enough force to crack it and All Might who was shooting the cup concerned glances over his own.“We can’t tell Inko Midoriya that her son is dead.” No shit. There was too much showing that All For One wasn’t after a corpse. Deku wasn’t stone cold dead and that meant they had to find him. He might be worse than stone cold dead, but dead or not they had to do something. Unlike most missing person reports, they knew exactly which bastard had him. It was only a matter of finding All For One and finding Deku. Finding All For One, then kicking his front door and all of his respective shit in. Outright lying like those shit gargling backyard dumpsters in the police wasn’t an option.

“So what the fuck do we do about it, then?” Mrs Midoriya wasn’t really getting any better on the Katsuki Bakugou scale of Having Your Shit Together. At least she could could cook for herself now and was slowly going shopping on her own again. Still not enough to be ranking high on the Having Your Shit Together Scale, but an improvement. Todoroki was still sneaking by as a second opinion and agreed. There was improvement, but not enough improvement to not completely destroy her when it came out where Deku really went.

“I think we will have to elaborate on the official police version,” All Might grimaced and Katsuki snorted.

The official version where Deku magically disappeared and fucked off down La La Lane like he was some sort of runaway who hadn’t just eaten a building for his classmates. Pricks. Most those useless bastards ever did was fill out forms for captured villains and fine people for using a Quirk while riding their bicycle to work. None of them knew shit about what Deku or anyone else did out there with shitrags like Shigaraki on the run. No fucking idea. Then to pull that shit. It was months on now and Katsuki still wanted to shove a cinderblock up

that first detective's arse and rotate it.

"Yeah, that'll go down fucking well. Telling her that her son's corpse was abducted and reanimated by the local psychopath who likes turning people into living weapons. Putting shit into a vase and calling it flowers doesn't make it any less shit in a vase." Katsuki rolled his eyes. "If we make that fucking announcement, he'll definitely know we're looking for Deku." And take steps to fuck people off from looking for Deku. Whatever that prick had in mind, he wasn't going to be happy if All Might kicked in his front door regardless of the reason.

"He might already know that we're searching for young Midoriya," All Might observed over steepled fingers. "The interrogation tapes aren't exactly securely stored. You find them sitting on desks and all sorts of places. If All For One wanted to know what was happening within the police, it wouldn't be difficult for him to do so."

"Shit." All Might was right. All For One might already know, if only because of the police and their shit security. "If he does know, then why hasn't he done shit to stop us yet?"

"Traces," All Might coughed. "Every time he makes an appearance he leaves traces. It's how I found his operations last time. With Kurogiri in custody…"

"It makes moving around for him a lot fucking harder," Katsuki finished. "He's laying low." Gritting his teeth, Katsuki could only think of one real reason for why that would be done. "Is he waiting for One For All to fade?"

All Might did something halfway between a shrug and a nod. "It's very possible. Neither myself nor All For One have the strength that we once did, but in my case One For All is only the remaining embers. He still has his Quirk in its entirety."

Didn't take a fucking genius to work out what that meant. All For One might be maimed, but he'd still have more than enough to steamroll a Quirkless All Might. Shit, he blew away half a fucking city after coming back from the dead. Even every other pro with their Quirks weren't gonna be worth anything without All Might. Kamino was a curb stomp in All For One's favour, even while flooded with heroes. One single cleave would've blown them the fuck away. All For One didn't have to give a shit about everyone else. And if All Might was gone… and Deku was gone, he didn't need to give a single flying fuck

about anyone else.

That wasn't even the worst of it. Katsuki had been around Deku long enough to know that some Quirks were functionally fucking magic, just like All Might's Quirk. All For One might be on the ropes now, but all he needed was something with the right fucking Quirk to come along and he'd be straight back to his prime. The only thing stopping him from stomping in the rest of the pro heroes in reality was time. Unlike All Might, who had no way of getting his Quirk back and no way of fixing the damage, All For One existed outside of the commonly accepted rules of Quirks. With him, anything and everything was possible. That meant taking on someone who was functionally immortal in more ways than his age. That meant some unconventional solutions.

"Unless we pulling something out of our arse, I think we're screwed," Katsuki instead voiced. All Might was smart. He didn't need to hear Katsuki's bullshit. "Even if we do find All For One and Deku, we still have to get to Deku." Then keep Deku. If All For One was desperate enough to steal a dead body, Katsuki could only imagine the sort of shit All For One would wheel out to keep a living Deku. No one connected to UA could even grapple why All For One would want a living or dead Deku. For good reason too.

"If he ditched out on a fight with me to recover young Midoriya's body, then I can only assume gaining access to him would be as difficult as capturing All For One himself," All Might grimly agreed. "I'm still concerned by Tsukauchi's observations on the matter."

Tsukauchi had observations? This was the first Katsuki was hearing about them. "What fucking observations?" What disturbing shit were they hiding from him this time? Not that Katsuki blamed him, this shit was traumatic, but neither of them knew Deku like Katsuki did. Katsuki was more than qualified for the job if only they told him the shit he needed to know to help them. The least he could do was take one for the team when his weakness got Deku killed in the first place.

Flitting across All Might's face was the same sort of expression Katsuki's mother had when some neighbourhood kids left a flaming bag of dog shit at their front gate. "All For One's potential stalking behaviours towards young Midoriya."

Katsuki almost sprayed his tea across the table. It was enough for All Might to hurriedly set his own down. "What the fuck? What fucking stalking behaviours? Wasn't that because of One For All?" What the

fuck was going on here?

“We’re starting to think,” All Might whispered, “that One For All might not be as much of a factor in All For One taking his body as we first assumed.”

“What the fuck does that mean?” Katsuki barked across the table.

“All For One has, typically, killed One For All wielders and been done with it. He’s never tried to recover bodies before.” Face crumpling, Katsuki could tell he hit a fucking nerve and felt his stomach sink. “All For One has been more partial to incinerations or total obliteration than the recovery of any bodies,” All Might said in a very small voice. Small enough that Katsuki suspected that it happened to a personal friend of All Might.

That only made Katsuki want to pace and work off the newfound surge of energy. “So what the fuck does it mean if he took Deku?” Why would All For One give a shit about someone as plain as Deku? Deku who was nothing special to anyone.

All Might was doing the thing. That deep fortifying breath shit that people did when they were about to drop bad news. Shit. “We had Gentle’s offsider La Brava investigate the staff records for information pulls on the students.” Oh shit. “And it was found that Vlad King had accessed and downloaded young Midoriya’s records.” *Oh shit.*

“I fucking knew it was that bastard!” Katsuki slammed the table with a fiery fist and it jostled into the air. All Might didn’t even flinch when his teacup cracked and spilled on landing, his head was buried in his hands.

“That’s not the worst of it. King pulled everything, young Bakugou.” All Might was shuddering.

“What the fuck does everything mean?” Deku’s grades? His practicals? What? What the fuck was everything to UA?

“His grades, comments of teachers, his medical records, teaching notes made on his Quirk, letters sent to his mother…” All Might paused, then said even more quietly. “Recorded practicals of his classes we used for teaching purposes, his classwork, his future classwork, anything that was ever said or noted about young Midoriya was taken.” Then All Might outstretched his hands. “To make matters worse, Aizawa remembers King asking about 1-A’s Quirks prior to the camp.”

That was the bone Katsuki had been waiting for and he chomped his teeth down on it before All Might could get another word in. “But that prick already saw all of our fucking Quirks at the Sports Festival! He didn’t need to ask shit about them.” Katsuki didn’t feel the need to specify if he was talking about Vlad King or All For One. It was the same shit after all. “It’s not like King was personally involved in the training for our Quirks. Wasn’t Deku under Tiger for that?” Katsuki slammed the table again and a pale faced All Might watched without comment. “Deku’s Quirk is fucking obvious as well.”

All Might shook his head. “Not if All For One was expecting young Midoriya to have a different Quirk to what was displayed at the Sports Festival.”

“Why the fuck…” Katsuki didn’t need to finish that question. “You two think All For One knew about Deku prior to UA, don’t you?”

Biting his lip, All Might blow for blow matched the rage Katsuki felt. Why the fuck didn’t they say this sooner? “Search, young Bakugou. All For One couldn’t have known where young Midoriya was without Search.” That’s right, Search needed the user to sight the person. Deku and Ragdoll both said that. All For One could have possibly seen Deku when he flew in with Kirishima and the rest, but was there a limit on the sighting aspect to? Or was it a requirement that All For One saw Deku sometime before Kamino?

“Those records King accessed started the day after young Midoriya’s intervention at the USJ,” All Might added and Katsuki felt a cold wind come from nowhere. “All For One must have recognised young Midoriya from the description to be able to specifically request details when even King at that point didn’t know any of 1-A’s students. All For One is fast, but there could be any countless numbers of green haired boys with enhancement Quirks. In hindsight, we doubt it’s mere coincidence.” There was still wriggle room though. Couldn’t Vlad have just looked up Deku? Then what would have been the excuse for him to ask around? Why the fuck was this so difficult?

“You think that bastard knew Deku before he was a UA student.” There was no fucking way Deku was in on any of that shit. Deku would never tolerate some ancient reptile experimenting on people for shits and giggles.

“It’s possible… that young Midoriya was a young victim of All For One’s Quirk and has no recollection of the experience. All For One shouldn’t have had a reason to suspect anything out of the ordinary

with young Midoriya, not unless he knew him first." Deku was five when that self fart huffing fuckwit Tsubasa came back with Deku's diagnosis. Deku hadn't ever shown a Quirk for All For One to even steal. Unless it was some freak fucking mutation, Deku should have either had Telekinesis or his dickhead absentee dad's Fire Breathing. Nothing special for All For One's consideration, who was dropping city busters like they were going out of style. Deku's family had weak Quirks. Deku didn't have a Quirk, but more than made up for it by being fucking insane. That couldn't be a special feature that attracted All For One, could it? What the fuck had a Quirkless Deku done to attract that bastard's attention? Was All For One cheering wildly while Deku dived on fucking landmines? There was a fucking thought and a half.

"Are we fucking sure it's a Quirk that All For One is after?" He was gritting his teeth. Katsuki was outright fucking grinding his teeth. "Why the hell would he want all of Deku's personal shit if it was just about a Quirk?" Quirks were easy to investigate. "All For One had the Noumu, yeah? Why didn't he just fucking sic one on Deku if he wanted to see his Quirk?"

"Therein lies the problem, young Bakugou." All Might's head was back in his hands. "We're starting to suspect that All For One's interest in young Midoriya was never about his Quirk or lack thereof one." Another shuddering breath. "Young Midoriya has encountered the Noumu before, both at the USJ and his encounter and with Stain."

Katsuki bit down the urge to ask about what fucking encounter with Stain. Of course Deku ran into fucking Stain. He ran into every other psychopath in this shithole of a country. "And?"

"Contrary to how they handled everyone else, they didn't seem inclined to harm him… Just like…"

"Just like Shigaraki," Katsuki finished feeling the world spin. Shigaraki who could give them orders due to some sort of programming. Why the fuck would Deku be excluded, just like Shigaraki, before the Noumu ever entered UA?

"There is another problem as well…" There was that fucking quiver again and it was starting to shit Katsuki. "Muscular never made it to prison," All Might whispered. "He was taken from the local Villain Hospital on the day of his capture without anyone seeing the perpetrator."

“Only him?” Katsuki reeled.

“Only him.”

Muscular, the psychopath who coincidentally did the most damage to Deku and almost killed him, was immediately targeted by someone who had to have a warping Quirk. Muscular who was now missing. Only one warping Quirk was coming to Katsuki’s mind and, like All Might, he had to wonder what the fuck had happened for All For One to what, take offence on Deku’s behalf? Why only Muscular? What the fuck happened between All For One and Deku and why the fuck didn’t Deku seem to know anything about it? All in the scant hours before Kamino too, such was All For One’s… what? Rage? Contempt?

What the fuck was going on? And how the fuck did Deku get a crusty old bastard like All For One for stalker? There was something about this entire thing that was pissing Katsuki off. Like he was missing part of an extremely obvious jigsaw puzzle that was just sitting in front of him, laughing at him for being so fucking useless. A piece he'd heard or seen before that gnawed away at him like some sort of parasite.

And when he found that missing jigsaw piece, he was going to fucking strangle it.

Chapter End Notes

Don't mind the typos, I've been sick for two weeks and it's now or never.

Education

Chapter Summary

You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The teacher had a lot of strange requests since he was asked to take a look at UA records of one Izuku Midoriya of 1-A. No one else at UA got the attention that Midoriya did. No concern for anyone else's Quirks or grades or performance evaluations in practicals or their recordings. Just Midoriya. Midoriya who was endlessly appraised and fussed over. No detail too small to be recorded and reported. No mishap too minor. Midoriya's records were a constant fixture in his teaching at the school. Maybe the only fixture. Other students would come and go, but anything on Midoriya would always somehow, for some reason, be relevant no matter how many years had passed.

Maybe that's why it was so strange that he was no longer here. There were no more records to request. The logical outcome ensued and Midoriya's records abruptly ground to a half. There were no more academic results to pass on, no more practical recordings to sneak from the system. No more chatter from the students or comments from the teaching staff. There was no more Izuku Midoriya to provide the data. Nothing objective, but that didn't stop all of the requests.

No, those requests became more esoteric. Responses to the death, which student said and did what, how people behaved in the aftermath, what they did, how All Might reacted, how the parents reacted and the teacher provided all of that faithfully. Yaoyorozu who had a mountain of dolls and a memorial to plan without the mother's knowledge, Bakugou who was ripping through the school and beyond looking for *something*. Monoma and Shinsou who were up to something that no other teacher was willing to see, Kirishima who was treating people like the world was about to end. Todoroki who was caught dropping icicles on journalists near Midoriya's home. 1-A and 1-B who were taking an unnaturally large interest in the opt in first aid course Recovery Girl was providing, for reasons that were clear to anyone who knew the history.

Things were moving, at any rate. Not at the same rate, nor with the

same energy, but they were slowly inching along the students of UA. For all intents and purposes, the information itself being given seemed useless as far as the teacher was concerned, but he did as he was asked. Sensei had gone to ground since the incident and showed little interest in making moves on UA or All Might after Kamino. Life, quite sadly, had all accounts gone on and left Izuku Midoriya behind. Forever fifteen. The government not allowing him to die, just by them withholding a stroke of a pen. Izuku Midoriya would live on for as long as the coroner and government lived in denial of his death. For as long as that happened, UA and Midoriya's family would have no closure.

But… did it any of it matter when the boy was dead? The stroke of a coroner's pen couldn't change the reality of the night and what happened. It couldn't change that there was a missing, but still broken body in the ruins. There was no coming back from pulverisation. At least not by Recovery Girl or conventional means. Very few pro heroes with enhancement Quirks could take the full impact of a skyscraper slamming them into the pavement. Izuku Midoriya was a fragile child already scraped to the bone by an aggressive and unpredictable Quirk. If that Quirk was active when the building struck, his chances were even less than what people had optimistically assumed in the first place. The boy was gone. And it was entirely his fault. His assumption. His slip of the tongue. They'd gotten away the first time, right? Why not the second? But no, that wasn't what happened. Not this time. This time it was Midoriya and the teacher could almost feel Sensei's tangible wrath. That accusatory presence, that voice trembling with emotion.

Why was he there?

Why did no one know he was present?
Why was All Might surprised to see him?
How did his mother not notice him failing to return from the hospital?

What was UA doing?

How did five children track a Noumu to Kamino without intervention?

Why were none of them in protective custody after the camp was attacked?

And was that press conference truly more important than preventing Izuku Midoriya's intervention?

No, Midoriya wasn't meant to die. While the teacher sat before the cameras, sweating, Midoriya ran wholeheartedly to his death. No one

had been paying attention. Not UA, not the police, not All Might. Not Sensei. No one. All had thought the fear of being branded a villain and going against the rules would have prevented reckless thoughts, but all had underestimated Midoriya. All had underestimated that tiny clutch of students who acted without regard for any rules or laws. Midoriya who didn't follow any rules. Midoriya who didn't think twice about discarding society's rules and encouraged the other students to follow him. Midoriya who was more terrifying than any prospective villain the teacher had ever met in his career.

Terrifying because Midoriya was right and the teachers and pro heroes were *wrong*. What did the view of society matter when those views killed people? Bakugou who never would've been recovered without Midoriya's interference. Midoriya who died while firmly standing on the high ground and laughing at everyone below. And there was absolutely no way the government would ever admit to it. Midoriya would never die, because they couldn't let his actions become real. He would have to stay a boy who ran away in the chaos and not a child who outsmarted the government and all of the adults in his life.

Katsuki Bakugou was still here, a trade for Midoriya, but that didn't mean the teacher didn't feel cheated by the experience. Bakugou's violent and mercurial behaviour had only worsened with Midoriya's death, not improved. Bakugou lashed at students, teachers, random passersby and what could even be said to quell the rage? Midoriya was dead. No pro heroes had been there to pull Bakugou away from Sensei during All Might's interference and none had been there to shield Midoriya's classmates from the fallout. Only now was Bakugou's frothing wrath understandable, even though Bakugou hadn't been on good terms with Midoriya by all accounts. There was indignation, there was vengeance and there was the teacher's sudden sense that his time was accelerating without control towards a dead end with Bakugou blocking the only escape.

Bakugou's retaliations were swift and final. Monoma had seen the error of his ways and the intimate insides of the cafeteria roof that no student had seen before or after. There were whispers though of other students in other areas of study who had also become targets. A Support student whose speculation was a little too loud for Bakugou not to hear. Murmurs from and older Heroics student who had a commentary that was a little too dismissive. General Education and Management students who lived in terror of an explosive phantom at their backs for a single misspoken word about Midoriya's honour. And people said nothing. What could the teachers even say? It was their fault. It was his fault.

Bakugou was dealing with the consequences of a mistake decades older than him and his trail of carnage had no end in sight. What would happen once Bakugou had left UA and become a pro hero? What would his actions cause when he refused to not hold people to account for their inaction and negligence? When he demanded answers from people too scared to accept responsibility? It was a thought almost as frightening as that of Izuku Midoriya in the same role. A role where they had the influence to warp the thinking of those around them into something detached from a society the rest of them could navigate and manage. There would be no escape from the crushing weight of people who could see others for what they were at their core.

The teacher thought the perpetual gloom haunting Bakugou and 1-A hadn't spread to 1-B, but he was wrong. So very wrong. It started and ended with a practical. It began with Komori and ended with Katsuki Bakugou who was still at UA. Still here. Who hadn't left, who refused to take the offer. Katsuki Bakugou who was embroiled in one of the most savage vendettas to grace UA.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" Bakugou screamed an inch from Komori's face. Komori who flinched and back-pedalled.

"Winning?" Komori replied with uncertainty. Why was she afraid? Why didn't she scream back at the brat? Nothing he had to say was going to be of any worth.

"Winning? You think almost fucking killing someone in a pretend exercise is winning? You think you're allowed to do this shit in real life?" Bakugou's spittle flew, splashing Komori who recoiled. "What fucking happens if there's civilians in those buildings? What happens if you-" Bakugou shoved her hard with both hands and she stumbled back "- fucking kill someone because you don't have the antidote to your fucking spores? Do you think our fucking paramedics have anti-fungals streaming out their arse? Do you think they have their own personal on call Ponytails to shit out antidotes into the ether because you fucked up?" He stepped forwards and shoved her again and she fell to the ground. "Do you have the money to compensate Tokoyami's family after you damaged his fucking lungs? All so you can win some shit, irrelevant exercise?"

This was too far, he had to intervene! An arm flew out, blocking him.

"No," Eraserhead shook his head from side to side. "1-B need to hear this, as unpleasant as it sounds." *Because a student's already died from*

someone's carelessness, was the unspoken whisper. *My carelessness. Izuku Midoriya should not have died and Katsuki Bakugou is still here.*

"I didn't mean…" Komori's eyes were filling with tears.

"No one gives a fucking shit about what you do or don't mean, you fungal pop-tart." Bakugou was still advancing, sparks flying and everyone took a collective step back. "Do you think anyone gives a shit about *your* feelings when you kill someone? When you maim someone? Do you think that the parents of the person you killed are going to give a solitary, oscillating fuck about how *you* feel after you murdered their kid? *Their* kid is the one who isn't coming home, *because you fucked up*, Shit Lips!" If anyone felt strongly about the word murder being used, they weren't brave enough to comment in it. Not unless they wanted to have the term personally demonstrated to them.

"But-"

"-No. Fucking. Buts. You would have killed every single fucking person in that city district because you can't fucking control yourself. We're pro heroes in training, not some group of asshole, blackmarket demolitionists comparing dick sizes," Bakugou snarled, teeth ferally glinting in the outdoors. "This is practice for real life and if you, and your retard classmates, ever do this shit out in the real world I'll personally hunt you down and shove my foot so far up your arse that they'll need a dedicated extraction team at the local hospital to find it and remove it." There was little doubt to anyone watching that Bakugou would, with his usual distinction, carry out that threat if he felt it was required.

"But sensei said-" Monoma tried to interject.

-"Sensei? Didn't your fucking shithead of a sensei teach you that fucking up an entire city for a handful of villains is a fucking stupid idea?!" Bakugou screamed back into Monoma's face. "No one gives a shit about your shithead of a sensei, Monoma. He's a fucking nobody out there. He won't be watching, but I will be," Bakugou hissed with a chilling finality, turning on his heel and stalking away.

The teacher backed even further away as Bakugou brushed past, the sneer and focused intent honing in solely on him. Jaw parting, teeth lifting then snapping back down. Still, Bakugou marched on past without another backwards glance.

"You okay, bird brain?" Bakugou's voice floated over, as he grabbed

Tokoyami by the shoulder. “Let’s go see Recovery Girl, that shit can’t be good for your lungs.”

“You don’t need to concern yourself-”

“-Yes, I fucking do, since 1-B’s teacher doesn’t give enough of a shit to do his job.” The teacher tried not to wince. Tried not to say anything at all while the sweat dripped.

And together they staggered off, with the rest of the group in silence and Komori sobbing into the wind. Eraserhead raised an eyebrow and shrugged. “As Bakugou pointed out, wide scale destruction and damage to a city and its surroundings is not acceptable. There will be civilians to be rescued and your fellow heroes supporting your actions. It shouldn’t be necessary to render a city uninhabitable in the pursuit of villains, especially if the villains aren’t targeting civilians during the pursuit.”

“But Bakugou-” Monoma started in a strangled squawk.

“-Bakugou had a point,” Eraserhead said bluntly. “I believe he, while rough in his wording and conduct, made UA’s concerns and the concerns of Hero Public Safety Commission clear.” Eraserhead’s expression wasn’t inviting any further commentary, even from the other teaching staff. “Furthermore, anyone who causes such injuries to their classmates during one of these exercises will be a candidate for expulsion. We have a zero tolerance policy starting from today.”

A zero tolerance policy that wouldn’t entreat anything but the most acceptable of competitive behaviours. The teacher had known something was in the works, but this was a step further still than anything he had contemplated. This would rip the teeth out of class spars and spirit. How were they meant to stage classes without anything close to real combat experience? Not that 1-A seemed to care. They shrugged and accepted it with grace, but 1-B were definitely more apprehensive.

Yes, life was moving on without Midoriya, but that didn’t mean his impact wasn’t still making waves long after his passing. Sensei would have to be informed about this change in policy. Shame it was too late to save Midoriya’s life.

The murky blackness was back and all throughout it was a keening cry, but still the scene played. All For One with his legions of followers, in all their glory, who sold their soul to a devil and killed without command (not that All For One was complaining). The power trip, the locking of his brother into a vault, his inability to take “no” for an answer which left Izuku shaking his head in sympathy for the brother. It was familiar enough for Izuku to peg it as a memory. The source of the accusation that had slipped out earlier? It felt like it. It felt real. The ghost of a long dead person who reached out to touch his hand and tell him that he wasn’t alone. Why it felt the need to say it was anyone’s guess, but Izuku could appreciate it somewhat with his current quality of company. But it felt so real.

Just as real as waking up to All For One yet again pinning Izuku down with an expression of concern. Not that Izuku had the words to explain what happened at the time. It was something he had to sleep on and told All For One as much. All For One who… didn’t push the issue at all and nodded silently in response. Had something happened while Izuku slept? All For One wasn’t up for discussion at the moment either, which made Izuku sigh with relief and he sank back into his thoughts. For once, he didn’t have to deal with an immediate interrogation.

What was surprising was the accuracy of All For One’s explanation. All For One wasn’t lying when he said he offered a compromise and his brother had outright said no. The brother who rejected using Quirks for using personal reasons and rejected All For One’s compromise just as the man had stated weeks prior. If anything, All For One had been sugarcoating the flat no, but the context explained why there was such a flat no. Even back in the day All For One was allowing his followers to run around murdering people. What made him think his brother was going to sign up to a criminal organisation that had wanton murderers populating its ranks? Did All For One really think that familial connections were going to override the immorality of the behaviour he was condoning? Maybe if All For One hadn’t been giggling like a girl scout about the murder of his competition, his brother might not have viewed him as an irredeemable monster.

Izuku had to smother a laugh at the thought of All For One not bothering to finish the comic. All For One at least had his health, but the brother clearly had a lot more time to be consuming media with the encompassing nature of his health problems. All For One who had clearly been elsewhere by this point in time. What happened? What forced them apart? Why did All For One struggle to hold onto this link

when clearly his brother was beyond caring about what he had to say? Izuku understood it from both perspectives, but there was so much missing context that didn't explain their respective decisions.

While Izuku didn't have a brother to fight with to the death, he did have his mother who refused to support him in any avenue of life. On one hand, Izuku completely understood All For One's attempts to have his brother support him in his… venture. To have family accept you and your path. On the other hand, Izuku also stood in the position of All For One's brother and had come to accept that no amount of words or actions could ever make someone set in their ways agree with you. Then, all you could do was sever ties with them to stop anymore hurt. Izuku had tried to convince his mother, then when that hadn't worked out, he'd abandoned her opinions and made his own way in the world without her support. The event itself made sense and left Izuku mentally shaking his head. Sometimes the differences between people were insurmountable, even if you were related to them.

Could it have happened differently between the brothers? There was no real way of knowing. All For One hadn't been entirely dishonest in his recounting of the divide, but that didn't mean All For One knew all of his brother's reasoning for giving up on him. It'd also raise even more awkward questions about how Izuku had come to discover it in the first place, when All For One guarded his name and history so jealously from discovery. Confirming it was going to be difficult and Izuku wasn't in a position where All Might was available to help. For now, he would have to sit on it and see if anything else happened.

All in all, the memories in and of themselves didn't bother Izuku. No, he'd suspected for a while that One For All carried more secrets than the average Quirk. No, it was the source. There wasn't a single memory that All For One didn't appear in, but Izuku couldn't say the same for the man's brother. The founder of One For All didn't follow All For One to the riots the latter had quelled, which meant the memories Izuku was being shown weren't from All For One's brother. They were All For One's *own* memories being shown to Izuku. Why did One For All have All For One's memories? And why was the Quirk heavily preferencing All For One's memories to the brother's even while wearing the face of All For One's brother? It smelt fishy. It almost smelt like the Quirk was confirming All For One's perspective of the argument instead of taking the middle ground.

Could One For All wear other faces? Why wear the wrong face for the wrong set of memories? Could it take All For One's appearance? Why were All For One's memories in the Quirk in the first place? All Might

had said that All For One had given the stockpiling Quirk to his brother. Perhaps it snapshotted All For One in the time between his time of acquiring of and passing on the Quirk? Again, not that there was any way of knowing that without asking All For One himself what had happened and Izuku wasn't going to put himself in that position if he could avoid it. All For One was already severely disturbed by One For All. Izuku really didn't want to give him an excuse to attempt to meddle more externally with the Quirk.

Those memories though… Memories where All For One spoke of establishing an "order". Memories where All For One ran a clear barter service. A Quirk for a favour. A favour for a Quirk. Memories which conveniently left out why the brother accused All For One of using people and what had led up to that opinion. Memories that showed All For One making a difference in spite of his brother's accusations. Memories where, giddiness aside, All For One behaved entirely more human than his current incarnation of a supervillain and his mad scientist sidekick. If anything. All For One's brother provoked All For One's rage by dismissing the attempt at "order" and the refusal to come with All For One. That's… not something that would upset an honest to goodness supervillain in Izuku's experience. An honest to goodness supervillain would be flattered, but All For One wasn't at all happy with what was said.

What happened to All For One? What turned someone who operated under the provisions of creating "order" into a card carrying supervillain who engaged in human experimentation? How did All For One go from laughing at people like Shigaraki from on high to attempting to create one of them? Was it really order All For One was after or did he seek something else? Was it an excuse in the same way Shigaraki was an excuse? All For One was an extremely secretive person and age seemed to have only made it worse. He couldn't tell his brother the real reason for his actions, just as he couldn't tell Izuku his reasons for keeping Izuku alive and Izuku rolled his eyes at one of the few consistent pieces of personality that followed All For One to old age.

It wasn't guaranteed that One For All would even be able to show Izuku more of its history, not with the breaks in his body. Either he would see it and die in the process or he'd die beforehand, never knowing the rest of the story. What happened next, no one knew.

Phasing back into reality, Izuku noticed All For One's deep frown. "Huh, what's your problem?" Izuku absentmindedly asked. Apart from having to pin down a rogue Quirk.

“I heard my brother’s voice, Izuku,” All For One quietly answered. “It brought back memories.”

Izuku felt his blood run cold and his chest throb with pain.

Hindsight was a remarkable thing. Well it would be if the doctor had any to explain Sensei’s increasingly precarious and almost frenzied behaviour. This level of dedication to such a charitable project was new. As of now, the doctor didn’t have much to go on apart from a handful of observations. The most stark of which was the sicker Midoriya became, the most frenzied Sensei’s own actions became in turn. They were running out of time to find a solution. Midoriya’s wounds had to be healed to prevent his imminent death, but the imperfect process and constant reopening of the internal wounds would only be held at bay for so long. The drug was wearing off and Midoriya’s body steadily folding under the strain, unable to supply the energy needed to hold his failing organs together. Now, Midoriya and Sensei shared the status of two people dancing at the boundary of limbo. Sensei who was clawing at life and Midoriya who was teasing death. Sensei who had already lived a long life and wanted to stay. Midoriya who had lived a short life and was content to leave on the earliest train from the station.

The only person who seemed remotely content with the situation was Midoriya himself, who snuggled into his sheets with relief every night without a single worry. Midoriya was ready to leave, even if Sensei was dragging him back onto the platform with every ounce of strength. How was Sensei meant to save someone who had absolutely no intention of being saved? Sensei had seen this before, he knew what was going to happen. Yet he persisted in the face of the inevitable, much like Midoriya himself had by attending UA. Both knew what was coming and both ran to meet the consequences of their actions. It was an impossible situation and for the first time, the doctor felt the creeping edges of doubt. Doubt about the plan. Doubt for Sensei’s benefit.

Oh, of course he doubted Shigaraki. Shigaraki was little more than a scared child trapped in the body of an adult. No independence, no vital skills, no ability to act when strings weren’t being pulled. Certainly, he was growing more independent by the week, but it was never going to be enough. Not when Sensei’s efforts were halfhearted at best. Sensei had always kept his distance and now was no different with Shigaraki being trapped in the bowels of Tartarus. If Shigaraki

ever intended to leave that particular hole in the ocean, he would be on his own in doing so. Now there were other priorities that superseded a grudge with a relic of bygone era.

Midoriya, on the other hand, was a far more frightening prospect. Midoriya was a scarred, seasoned adult, forced into the body of a child and made to play by the rules of his lessers. Midoriya didn't care for the approval of others. He had the will and the means and that was enough to carve his way through the masses of the unwilling without a single lick of regard for society's opinion, approval or consent. What did he care if the government or world burned, if he thought there was some injustice or matter he could address better? It was the confidence of someone who knew the game of life and could play it well without any assisting hands. Izuku Midoriya didn't need Sensei's assistance to be one of the most dangerous players with a hand at the board of chess that was fought between the government, the pro heroes and the villains.

To make matters worse, Midoriya had no allegiance to these sides. Villainous acts didn't reduce his support for people and nor did heroic acts make him shake his head at acts of weakness. Midoriya picked and chose what suited him, not caring for the ideological battles being fought by other factions. If anything, there was a distinct air of contempt that followed Midoriya, as if the mere act of being involved in something so petulant was beneath him. Shigaraki had certainly felt that harsh sting, being told that he was nothing compared to a common serial killer. Sensei too had been demeaned for even acting the role of a supervillain, with Midoriya flatly shaking his head in disappointment at the answer.

In the race between Midoriya and Shigaraki, Midoriya was the clear victor in an endurance run that was so low down on Midoriya's list of concerns that the doctor doubted Midoriya even knew he was in the race. Shigaraki who struggled to gain Sensei's approval and would never succeed and Midoriya who had always had it and was frankly appalled by the notion.

Tomura Shigaraki wanted to live on and inflict his hurt on the world, as planned. Shigaraki who feared failure and death.

Izuku Midoriya had already died and resented his death being stolen from him, who would destroy the plan at the earliest opportunity. Midoriya who feared nothing.

Tomura Shigaraki was uncertain, but Izuku Midoriya was certain in

his lethality.

Sensei wasn't making the rational option of rescuing the one who wanted to remain on Earth and live out Sensei's will. Sensei had made the decision to save a child who didn't expect and didn't care if he was saved and had absolutely no intention of serving anyone's will but his own. Indeed, the boy resented their interference, spitting on their efforts and mocking the time investment needed to keep him alive. Izuku Midoriya was ungrateful. He always would be and never see eye to eye with Sensei. This was bound to end in failure of some sort. No progress to be made.

Chains of unknown sentiment were holding Sensei back from the logical decision. The doctor could understand if Midoriya's Quirk was the cause, and what a Quirk it was in both what it did to its environment and its wielder. But Sensei had no interest in this Quirk, only the person who held it and that made the doctor's ability to handle this situation far more difficult. Izuku Midoriya was no mere tool. Intellectually, he brought irreplaceable qualities to the table in a manner that even the doctor himself couldn't match. Those same qualities were lethal and just as easily used against Sensei and others loyal to him if Midoriya took issue with their plans. And Midoriya would take issue. His complete destruction of Shigaraki's ego left little doubt in that area. With such impossibly high standards, the doctor could only wonder if anyone was even capable of living up to Midoriya's standards when Sensei fell so short.

There had to be something that could be said or done for Sensei to heed the doctor's warning. To make him understand the risk that Midoriya posed to him. Midoriya, who with a twitch of his fingers, could level the entire building and kill everyone in it. The boy who at a moment's notice could regrant himself the death he thought he deserved at the expense of the entire surrounding area.

For now, though, all the doctor could do was watch. Watch the exchanges between Sensei and the boy. The barrages of cutting remarks, blows to inefficiency and criticism of "what are you? A cartoon supervillain? What made you think that was a good idea?" be levelled at an entity who had people killed for less. Watch Sensei's fond smile, even though with each passing day it grew smaller and smaller as Midoriya increasingly struggled to find and express words. Watch while knowing of Sensei's failsafe and knowing the senseless hurt it was going to cause to both involved parties.

Midoriya was a lost cause. Midoriya knew he was a lost cause. It was

only Sensei who was holding onto a fragile hope that their condition would one day improve to a stable state. Even though that restoration to a stable state would only encourage Midoriya in further violent acts and attempts on Sensei's life. The entire endeavor was a lost cause.

Bakugou's information carried creeping implications as well. Suspended Animation. A Quirk added to his collection that Sensei had said nothing about, nor requested assistance in its acquisition. A Quirk he wanted to conceal from the doctor. A Quirk that would only prolong the whole, sorry affair. Sensei surely knew it would only prolong Midoriya's suffering and Sensei didn't seek Midoriya's ongoing agony. They made strenuous attempts to ease the boy's pain, but nothing could ease the body's inherent sense of wrongness that came with severe and lasting organ failure. It was something no amount of pain reduction could treat. Still, Sensei was willing to risk suspending the boy in this state. A state where Sensei couldn't possibly know if the would retain some sort of awareness and potentially awareness where all pain relief was suspended as well. It wasn't rational. The boy was dying, but it was perhaps better for all of them that he be allowed to pass on with dignity if Sensei was truly sincere in his intentions.

The doctor had already tried to subtly raise these concerns and it fell on deaf ears. Sensei didn't want excuses or placations. He wanted Izuku Midoriya to live and live happily in spite of all that had happened. There was nothing the doctor could say or do to compromise with Sensei. All he could do his best to achieve Sensei's goals and even that wasn't going to be enough. These were injuries that exceeded the capacity of all but the most wily and dangerous of Quirks. Without the raw material, there was no way to temper or adjust an outcome where Midoriya would survive the damage he had sustained to his heart.

But Midoriya wasn't like Sensei. He had no fear of death and no pointless attachment to his ongoing pain. The boy had a sway over Sensei in this area that the doctor outright lacked… If Midoriya could be convinced to push the issue, maybe Sensei would rethink his unwise decision in attempting to prolong the experience of watching a terminally ill person fade away. There was no sentiment tethering Midoriya to life in the way Sensei clutched at the boy's listless form.

Maybe Midoriya himself was the key to solving the doctor's and his own problem, though catching Midoriya on his own and maintaining a civil conversation was going to be a challenge in and of itself. If Sensei was intolerant of certain behaviours, Midoriya was far more

advanced in his rejection of snivelling small talk and ego boosting. In the world of Midoriya, it was a strict meritocracy and whatever the doctor planned on saying better be with merit, or he'd again be without an avenue of attack. There was a chance, even if it was only a slim one.

But again, there was doubt. So much doubt. However to educate people who were unwilling to learn?

This was All For One's spy, was it? What a thoroughly unremarkable person. Not that there was really was anything remarkable about Sekijiro Kan and that was why he was so unremarkable in the first place. Danjuro had been digging up dirt on society's most fit and flighty reprobates, from creepy charity CEO to yapping yogurt company financial officer and there was always something in their past that gave the game away. La Brava could attest to that. Some of the less savoury discoveries on the computers and phones of corporate heads weren't even fitting for a video exposé. Danjuro wouldn't dare knowing what depravity was held on those devices. Instead, La Brava and Danjuro compiled a nicely anonymous package and sent it off to numerous police departments and pro heroes and hoped for the best. Hope that was rewarded with aggressive police raids. So far, at least, that part of society was functional and not dependent on the intervention of pro heroes. No one liked child abusers. (Or at least Danjuro liked to hope no one liked child abusers, but if that was the case, he was going to have to make some special arrangements.)

Still, it didn't change that Vlad King had nothing overt happening in life beyond his extremely lacking social interactions with his UA colleagues. From Yagi and All Might's provisions, Vlad wasn't even well liked by UA staff as a general rule. Certainly, none of their comments were flattering about his behaviour. His fiery and competitive attitude towards his fellow heroics teachers and their students wasn't well appreciated, especially with the government directive forcing focus on teamwork. (What a treat. He hadn't even passed hero school and here he was working for All Might!)

King had, overnight, become one of the UA principal's least favourite people from a matter of attitude alone and that did make Danjuro's job much easier. The principal didn't care for competitive spirit if it was injuring or risked death for the students. Midoriya's demise sent tremors through the industry, lest the reality of what happened make it to the outside world and UA wasn't any different in following the

new standard. King hadn't taken it with as much grace as his employer would have appreciated and Nedzu was doing his best to look in the other direction and whistle innocently while La Brava did unholy things with his computer. At least the mouse had spectacular sense in tea and news items to pass the time while La Brava did the deed.

Too many files on Midoriya had been accessed by someone who had no rhyme or reason to be accessing them. King had no reason to be saving one record, let alone so many. Saved externally as well. He wasn't one of 1-A's teachers in any capacity and Nedzu's narrowing eyes and increasingly maniacal laughter had Danjuro and Yagi exchanging expressions of curiosity.

"Oh dear, he wasn't very subtle, was he?" Nedzu cackled so maniacally that even Yagi leant slightly back. King was going to have a very bad day if the UA staff got to him before the police did.

"No, it would appear not. How very fortunate for us," Yagi agreed.

"I really don't understand why he would need so much information on Midoriya. This is… this is the kid's whole school record." La Brava was shaking her head. "This is creepo stuff," she whispered.

"Why do you think that, miss?" Nedzu stopped long enough to get the words out.

"No one… no one really wants *everything* about someone when it comes to business." Her hands waved through the air. "I mean, some companies keep dirt files and that's stuff that can be used as leverage, but this…" She pointed at Midoriya's teacher comments file. "This isn't leverage. This… this is creepy stalker stuff. This guy is beyond obsessed." Which said a lot, coming from La Brava who stalked Danjuro to his house, but All For One was indeed obsessed. Obsessed to the point where, days after the final entry had been left on Midoriya's file, it had been completely copied and saved elsewhere yet again. All For One didn't seem to want to miss a single detail, even after the boy was long dead. When the local overlord was hoarding personal information, it was time for the person and their entire extended family to be concerned and perhaps flee the country. Not that the poor boy could have known he was target. Who would have even suspected such a travesty of a thought? A normal boy being stalked by the single most unnatural man in Japan.

Danjuro curtly swallowed his tea. All For One's prospective stalking

had been one of the reasons Danjuro and La Brava were so quick to agree to All Might's terms before the threats even had to be wheeled out. The legendary fiend of Japan, ruler from the shadows, numerous centuries old… and he panicked when he killed a single child that he was revealed to have been stalking. Danjuro didn't really need to think too deeply to encounter numerous, sprawling, horrific trees of possibility he was currently smothering under a hefty swig of warm brew. Nothing good ever came from obsessive stalkers. Even less good came from obsessive stalkers who stole the bodies of their victims and had a long history of human experimentation. Yagi and All Might's fears were entirely valid.

"Stalking is putting it mildly. Vlad wasn't just collecting information on his schooling," Yagi grunted. "He's been popping up around student discussions as well and he's taken an unusual interest in the new school policy measures. If it's something related to Midoriya, Vlad's not far behind." And not far from King's unaware back, was Katsuki Bakugou, the blond boy Danjuro had only met once so far. Yagi had been downright proud of Bakugou's wannabe spy net who were reporting on King's every move. King wasn't even safe in the staff bathrooms it was so extensive. Nor any other isolated room, if the reports about Bakugou were accurate. Danjuro hoped All For One was offering his spy hazard pay.

"He's profiling Midoriya, even after the boy's departure," Nedzu mumbled more sombrely. "I must confess, I'm at a loss for what sort of information could be gleaned from discussion about him after his death. With Midoriya's Quirk I'm sure All For One would have been hungry for the information, but that should have ended with his death."

Danjuro stroked his moustache. "What if All For One's interest isn't connected to the Quirk at all, but the person?" Danjuro didn't know Midoriya terribly well, but he knew well enough that a seasoned rule breaker hero would stoke interest in the local villain population. Misery did like company, after all. "Villains on the whole tend to be sympathetic to our fellow breakers of societal moulds. From everything we've been told, Midoriya was something of a maverick."

Nedzu started, as if he'd forgotten that Danjuro was a fellow criminal. "Very true, Gentle Criminal! Midoriya was a seasoned maverick. What's your professional take on All For One's behaviour?"

"Midoriya has or had something he wants," Danjuro waved a hand for emphasis. "And he had it from a very young age if he was known to

All For One prior to UA. He was known to All For One before UA, wasn't he?" Danjuro asked of Yagi, who was currently glaring burning holes into his floral teacup.

"We have reason to suspect as much, yes. All For One was able to use a Quirk with requires eyesight to mark a target prior to activation. Without sighting Midoriya prior, he shouldn't have been able to locate him in the rubble," Yagi hissed.

And the obvious question. "Do you have any idea when this would have been?"

Yagi shook his head . "It could have been that he saw him for the first time at Kamino for all we know, but I've got a gut feeling that this is much older than Kamino. Those records were being taken specifically as soon as Vlad reported back on the USJ's outcome."

"And why the speed unless he already knows or suspects the person?" Danjuro wondered aloud.

"Or the name," La Brava chipped in. "His first and last name aren't very common. I haven't heard of any Midoriyas apart from him."

"Which means all Vlad needed was the name for All For One to spot Midoriya," Yagi growled and Danjuro felt the temperature drop. "I wonder if that's why he didn't act earlier. The bastard prioritised stealing information about the kid."

That added another staggering swirl to Danjuro's more disturbing thoughts about this entire, sordid tale. All For One was rather keen on finishing off All Might on account of a long feud… but put that feud on halt instead of using Midoriya as further bait. "All For One prioritised Midoriya's personal information above his encounter with All Might," Danjuro concluded to the gathering. "What we're missing is the why."

"I think I can add to the creepiness," La Brava chimed in. "King's still been taking copies of class notes for Midoriya's level."

Silence. The tingle of a spoon coming to a rest.

"He's. Been. *What*?" Yagi snapped, instantly to his feet. "Show me."

The rest huddled around the monitor and there they were, records of Vlad King still continuing to collect class notes for a dead boy. Maths, science, English, Japanese, the Heroics specific course content… even

plans for practicals. Everything that was in the system for future events had been stored elsewhere.

“Why would he collect notes for a dead student?” Danjuro let it hang. Maybe it hung in the air for too long, because there was a growing wall of tension dividing him and La Brava from the rest of the room. Or rather, Nedzu had sneakily placed himself between Yagi and Danjuro while the silence reached its peak awkwardness.

“Unless, he did the unthinkable,” Nedzu said in subdued tones, “and the dead student is no longer dead. It would explain why All For One still wants information on the poor boy. An evaluation of a possible return to the public eye?” Well, it was All For One. The man was a legendary monster for a reason. Raising the dead would surely be just another skill to an already extensive resume of shambling horrors. It wasn’t that surprising to him personally, but then again, Danjuro was also far more familiar with annals of history than other people as well.

There was a sharp click of Yagi’s teeth snapping shut. “I’m going to kill him,” Yagi said after a pause and Danjuro was left with the not insignificant impression of his own lungs exploding under tremendous pressure. Danjuro wasn’t sure if “him” referred to All For One or Vlad King, but both of them were about to have a *very* bad day if this crushing killing intent meant anything.

Nedzu bounced up to Yagi’s shoulder and made a valiant attempt at shaking him. “Yagi! There is a positive to this! We know from Vlad’s taking of the files that Midoriya must be in a cognitive enough state to read them! Midoriya might still be alive with his mind intact!” Personally, being alive and cognitive in the hands of All For One didn’t sound like much of an improvement over the poor boy being dead, but crushing anyone’s hope at this point in time was going to end in tears. Tears, ruined buildings and the deaths of at least two people. A lot more were going to die if they were stupid enough to attempt to stop Yagi.

“All For One doesn’t leave anyone intact,” Yagi spat. “Thank you for your time, you two, but I need to contact All Might and the team for further planning.” Yagi struggled out from between clenched teeth and gently placed Nedzu back onto the mouse’s desk. “I’ll be in touch with you. Contact me immediately if you find more.” And Yagi stalked from the room, leaving La Brava and Danjuro in the heart of UA and pro hero territory.

“That was certainly enlightening, Gentle and La Brava.” Nedzu was

clapping his hands eagerly. Clapping for villains. It was a surreal experience to have anyone clapping for him. “Not the most pleasant of discoveries, but one that’s good for morale nonetheless. Our student might be with us still!” The mouse thrust an arm into the air. “While you’re here though… do you suppose you could assist me with another matter? I’ll make some more tea while I walk you through it.”

Danjuro exchanged a shrug with La Brava, who was still dutifully pulling the records apart to see what else King had tampered with or taken.

That was fine by Danjuro. Now they knew Vlad was taking information, all they had to do was find out where he was leaving it and Danjuro could direct his cheerful supervisor accordingly. Then observe the result from a safe distance. Nedzu was meant to be intelligent and good with all things plans and perhaps he could help with this one in exchange for whatever other security problems the school seemed to be having due to King’s employment.

Chapter End Notes

> Unfortunately, illness has been persisting and my editing is not on the ball.

Palpitations

Chapter Summary

> A noticeably rapid, strong, or irregular heartbeat due to agitation, exertion, or illness.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

There was nothing half arsed about All Might's ability to plan a press conference. Shit, Katsuki wrote that down himself in the bogus resume they provided to Tsukauchi's superiors. Just about fucking everyone who was someone in the media, police or heroics got an invite. Apart from Nighteye, but fuck him. From the swell of the crowd, All Might's kindly worded threats of career harm were enough to get arses into gear. Giving the information was one thing. Having them all understand what deliberately pissing off All For One meant was another subject entirely. They had a second meeting for that alone.

Sure, the media were getting a story about a missing kid feared abducted by the psychopath who blew up Kamino. Those lucky bastards weren't being told the first, second or third thing about what All For One did to people for shits and giggles. Deku might be alive, but the definition of alive got extremely fucking out there once All For One entered the picture with his sick fuck experiments. Police and heroes though? They were getting the whole fucking story, warts and all. Every fucking Noumu, every fucking missing person. They weren't getting out of shit as far as grisly details were concerned.

One For All still couldn't be mentioned though. Last thing they needed was for that shit show to spill out into the public for every moron and their sheep to comment on it. Katsuki could see it now. *"Oh All Might, why didn't you give your instant win button Quirk that kills people to that mountain of muscle strapping lad who can't think his way out of a paper bag? What, it's a threat to national security? Who gives a shit, we're the media! Our opinion matters!"* It'd be an absolute fucking disaster. If Nighteye was in the industry and carrying on with that shit then the media would be a thousand times worse and so would the fucking government. And Deku wasn't even fucking buried yet.

If Deku, through some miraculous act, came back and wasn't a vegetable, then all of those dumbfucks would transfer their bullshit

from All Might and straight onto him. If Deku was... gone... then All Might was a sitting fucking duck while every fuckwit and their llama knew he was an easy target. There was no way in shit they were ever mentioning One For All. All Might, once this shit was done, would retire due to “old age” and never be seen or heard from again. Yagi would keep his job at the police putting the fear of himself back into Japan’s resident arsehole population and life would carry on. Sounded great to Katsuki.

Maybe All Might couldn’t be a pro hero, but that wasn’t the only area in society that needed a mop. The police were so shit that the basic idea of a phone trace was fucking beyond them. At least him being there encouraged them to use all of their resources and not just hoping someone with the right Quirk would come along to mop up their shit. It was a good job for retirement and it seemed to make All Might content in a way his regular job did, so why the fuck not? It’s not like he wasn’t qualified for the position. He was more qualified than most of the fucking senior police. The senior police who missed the green haired bastard who was standing in plain sight without a fucking pass to be seen.

Katsuki didn’t want to be here, but he had to be here. In the haze of the questions buzzing around the crowd he knew were was one bastard in particular who wasn’t on the invite list who swaggered into the fucking joint anyway like he owned the place. Did Nighteye’s foresight not tell them that barging into a police press conference uninvited was a solid way to have his arse thrashed into next week? Clearly fucking not. Katsuki would have to be kind enough to fix that for him.

Katsuki did what he did best and made his way to Nighteye. “Excuse me, excuse me, coming through, sorry, yeah, whatever, yo Todoroki’s old man, excuse me...” And with some effort managed to slide into place just behind Nighteye. Nighteye who was... yelling questions at All Might on stage.

“Excuse me, Detective Yagi,” Katsuki heard the snotty bastard sneer. What a living fucking used hanky.

“Yes, Sir Nighteye?” All Might sounded like even responding was a fucking tooth extraction. Nighteye basically was a fucking drill after the shit he’d been doing.

Oh, here it comes!

“I’m curious as to why so many resources are being poured into the locating of a student who, forgive my wording, was crushed to death by a falling building,” Nighteye hurled the accusation with a bullet’s trajectory. “Isn’t time and money better spent on those who survived the incident and their recovery?”

How fucking dare he - no one had told Inko Midoriya yet about the conflicting theories. What was this arsehole doing on national TV after the press and heroes had been specifically asked not to bring it fucking up? And to say Deku was a waste of fucking time? They fucking told everyone not to mention it.

Katsuki was going to kill him. End his miserable fucked life.

“Sir Nighteye, I find it difficult to accept any legitimacy in your concerns,” All Might responded with the sort of faux affability that’d have All For One wet himself in excitement. That was some real supervillain shit if Katsuki had ever heard it, putting UA’s mandatory acting training to fucking use like the pro he was. “After all, you were recently disciplined and your teaching registration was struck out after you weren’t found to be managing your intern in a safe and competent manner.” Shots fucking fired. Eat shit. Katsuki wasn’t sure who was happier about signing that paperwork. It was a close draw between the two of them.

“That is a personal matter between me and-” Funny, Nighteye didn’t give a shit that what Deku did was between him and All Might but Nighteye was happy to cover his own arse when a fire was lit under it.

“-Not when you’re on the public register,” All Might cut in with the sort of suaveness reserved for roleplaying in exams. Except this wasn’t RP. Katsuki knew a pissed All Might when he saw it. “You are a public servant and the status of your registration is available to the public for matters of transparency. If you wish to conceal such information from interested citizens, you’ve chosen the wrong path of employment.” Nighteye wasn’t there to help people. He was there for the feel good vibe of appearing to help people while not doing shit. Nighteye wanted to live a fucking lie and expected everyone to simper and say what great job he was doing while he forced a smile and watched their house burn down. Now there was a useless fuck.

“My employment requires that limited resources be spent in an effective manner,” Nighteye snapped back.

Gee, what effective manner was that? Cyberstalking All Might instead

of doing absolutely anything fucking productive? Shit, even Endeavor was doing useful shit. Came around to ask if the Midoriya family needed any help organising a memorial or if Inko Midoriya needed inpatient therapy because he knew a place. Katsuki wasn't sure what the fuck happened, but whatever was going on with the long lost son All Might dug up, Katsuki could see the difference. An alien pulling off a suit to reveal it's a human being underneath, but a productive human nonetheless. And what was Nighteye doing? Fucking stalking people. Great.

"Your resources weren't being well spent when you almost killed your student by failing to provide an exit strategy for A rank villain encounters." And weren't the gasps sweet? Newsflash, the guy's an arsehole. Yeah, Togata wasn't fucking happy about what happened. Didn't stop Katsuki from leaving some anonymous articles snapped to the guy's locker with a magnet and "NOTICE" written on it. Even if he didn't believe Detective Yagi, there was a cart load of media reports supporting Nighteye being a dick. Enough for Katsuki to immediately spot the warning Dickery Signs on the lead up of each article. Togata got ripped off and had a rough deal, but at least he wasn't dead or rotting in All For One's lab because Nighteye was a delusional fuckhead. At least he escaped that fate. Deku wasn't so lucky.

"What the Department did to me and my student was uncalled for!" Nighteye shrieked back and Katsuki covered his ears.

"What *you* did to your student was unforgivable. Did you even tell him that you expected him to be the next All Might before you sent him to be killed by people more than capable of obliterating fully trained pro heroes? Did he even know?" Nighteye was just asking for arsekicking at this point, because everyone in that conversation knew damn well that Nighteye didn't tell Togata shit about his expectations.

"He was more than capable of taking of himself in those instances," Nighteye howled back. That was a fucking mistake. Instances? As in the plural? What the fuck was he doing with his student? Was that dumbass seriously sending Togata out on rounds alone... and not fucking paying him? His parents were going to flip their shit when they heard about this bullshit. Fuck, Nedzu was going to pop a vessel then find a way of popping an object the size of a car straight up Nighteye's arse.

"Instances, huh? I guess we'll have to dig deeper to press charges of criminal negligence this time if you think using your intern as slave labour is an acceptable use of his time and safety." Katsuki winced. He

could practically hear the All For One imitation drip and fuck him if it didn't make him cringe in remembrance of how that bastard carried on with his faux friendliness. Fucking animal.

Nighteye was tensing, but before he could respond a pink woman barked a question. "Detective, what steps are being taken to locate Izuku Midoriya?" Katsuki knew it was coming. He'd suspected it since he saw the bastard in the crowd All Might had even fucking warned him. Didn't make him any fucking happier when the punk tried to start shit on a live fucking broadcast. Who the hell did Sir Nighteye think he fucking was to be picking a fucking fight here of all places?

So fucking what if All Might didn't answer his phone calls or respond to messages? There was no law saying a former employee who got fired for being a jackass was allowed to monopolise his former employers time because he couldn't fucking handle how the business was run. Come to think of it, wasn't the shit Nighteye doing outright harassment? Bastard was using burners to get around All Might's number blocks and email filtering. That had to be fucking illegal. The moment this shit was done with he was reporting it to the bastard who'd know if it was illegal or not.

Fucking stalkers and their fucking bullshit. All For One and Sir Nighteye, two fucking peas in a pod who gave kids false hope then sent them off to have their shit pushed in by reality. Katsuki really hoped those two were sharing a fucking cell after they caught the former.

In the din, Katsuki heard it from kilometres away though he was close enough to spit on him. "If All Might won't answer, then I'll have to get it from the next best source," Nighteye's livid fury sounded in Katsuki's ear, then there was a rush of air as Nighteye hauled arse. All Might wasn't fucking looking. All Might was answering another pink haired journalist. He wasn't looking. No one else was looking. No one was paying any fucking attention. What the fuck were people doing?

Katsuki sprinted after him, jumping members of the crowd as he ran.

He could see Nighteye make it onto the stage, see him open his mouth for more bullshit that didn't fucking matter.

Katsuki's hands exploded and he bounded onto the stage hot on his heels. Reeling his Quirk back, Katsuki launched all of his weight into a single right hook that shot from Katsuki across the empty space into Nighteye's jaw with a CRACK. Nighteye fell limply to the ground in a

haze of red.

“Keep your hands to your fucking self,” Katsuki screamed at Nighteye’s partially conscious body. “And keep your shitsplosion about Deku to yourself!”

And in a haze of white he shot downwards and unloaded another hook into Nighteye’s face.

Katsuki didn’t even remember when he’d decided to do it. It just sort of happened. In a cloud of red.

“Thank you, Bakugou,” came All Might’s quiet whisper and Katsuki didn’t regret a single second of it.

What a fucking prick.

And his vision still burnt red.

Sansa really hoped Bakugou had his funeral insurance ahead of time because no one hoisted into an interrogation room by Yagi left it the same way afterwards. Sure, they might be physically intact, but Yagi didn’t need to touch anyone to make them reconsider their life choices. Strictly speaking, it shouldn’t have been an interrogation room, but the higher ups had their concerns with Yagi... using his usual methods on a minor. They wanted to keep an eye on him, as if his entire employment hadn’t already consisted of him being watched around the clock while he wrung the information out of suspects like they were wet blankets.

It didn’t start the way it usually would, with Yagi escorting Bakugou in with quite possibly the strongest two mugs of coffee to exist in reality at that point of time.

“Take a seat, Bakugou.” Perfectly level. No hostility yet. Actually... Yagi giving anyone coffee at the beginning of an interview was new.

“Thanks,” Bakugou replied and took the offered mug with a sigh. “I already know what’s coming.”

Yagi set his mug down and clasped his hands in a familiar posture that made the whole room watching take a collective inch back. “So when

did you first become aware of Sir Nighteye's stalking of All Might?"

Yagi's observers collectively blinked. Sansa heard a whisper from behind. "Isn't this about him punching out Nighteye?"

"That's what I thought. What the hell. Stalking All Might? Didn't he used to work for the guy?" Another replied because Tsukauchi's hiss hushed them into silence.

Bakugou was taking his time to collect himself. "You got a piece of paper and a pen?"

Yagi obligingly slid both over and Bakugou drew a long line and began to write. With morbid fascination, the observers could only watch Yagi interview... a witness? "This is bizarro man."

"Shut. Up," someone else snapped back.

"Right," Bakugou gestured with his pen. "Shit happened around here." Sansa could only assume that Bakugou was gesturing at a date on a timeline. "We're having a study group at Gran Torino's house and Sir Nighteye busts in and starts talking shit." Gran Torino? What did he have to do with anything?

"Why his house?" Still calm and level. It was like a different person had slid into Yagi's shoes and taken his place. Had Yagi ever taught before? He reminded Sansa of an old school teacher he once had...

"He was Deku's mentor. It felt... it felt like the right place to be. We were talking about what happened to him." Bakugou was... attending a support group? "Not everyone could understand what happened so we... decided to help iron things out." From the bunching in Bakugou's face, Sansa knew a person dangerously close to tears when he saw it. He just wasn't expecting to be coming from raw... grief... instead of Yagi's technique.

"What happened?"

"The old man and I have a thing going. We talk shit to each other, you know? He slightly overcooks the taiyaki, I give him shit for it, he attacks my manners, blah blah you get the picture. It's a bit. Nighteye comes in whinging about All Might being missing. Old man asks me to come over to answer Nighteye's question since I go to UA, we talk shit then Nighteye butts in." Bakugou's flow of uninterrupted speech told the room something important. Bakugou wasn't scared. He was pissed off.

“Then?”

“He spoke shit about me, insulting my manners. I told him to fuck off, saying everyone knew why he got fired by All Might,” Bakugou nodded intensely, his hands sparking a safe distance away from anyone flammable.

“And how did you know about it?”

“Media,” Bakugou grunted. “There were whispers that Nighteye left because something in management wasn’t going how he wanted it. Read about it for years and didn’t think too much about it. Then I met the guy. Fucking arsehole and a half. Said that’s why he got fired.”

“And?” The observers were holding their breaths. Sansa’s teacup was frozen halfway to his mouth. This wasn't a usual Yagi interview. What was going on here.

“He said I didn’t know shit. I told him Deku would shit all over him if he was around.... and...” Bakugou’s face twisted into a feral snarl. “That arsehole said that he’s not around and still missing because of me.” A collective gasp and whispers of “what a prick” whispered around the room. Who said that to a kid whose friend died saving him? What an unpleasant human being.

“That really is a terrible thing to say about a missing person,” Yagi was nodding agreeably.

“No shit. The old man told him it was out of line and to get out. Good thing he did too, because the group wanted to beat his shit in after hearing that. Three of us wouldn’t still be here if it wasn’t for what Deku did and that arsehole wants to dump on him for saving people.” Bakugou leaned forwards. “He’s a fucking prick. That’s what he is.”

Sansa didn’t doubt that for a second. Sir Nighteye always had a reputation for being eccentric, but this level of nastiness from a well regarded professional was the sort of dark secret that Endeavor had in his past with his missing son. At least Endeavor cared about helping his son. The hell did Nighteye think he was doing bringing a missing kid down who couldn’t even defend himself? Unprofessional didn’t even begin to cover it. There were going to be more reports made to the authority.

“Anyway, that’s when it started. Was having lunch with All Might while we sorted out some extra credit assignments.” So the kid with an explosive temper was a nerd? Huh, the media reporting couldn’t

have been totally accurate then. Maybe he really was just having a bad day at the Sports Festival. “And All Might’s phone starts fucking exploding with all these messages. Shit asking him where he was, what he was doing, why he was wasting his time mentoring Deku, how much better Mirio Togata was than Deku... All this fucking shit.” Sipping from his coffee, it landed heavily back on the plate in a violent motion. “And it wouldn’t fucking stop. He must’ve gotten like seventy messages in fifteen minutes, I shit you not.”

“And how did All Might respond?” Yagi was writing now. Not an exact transcript, but his notes were an art to behold. If you could get past the abysmal handwriting.

“He was upset. His student had a building dropped on him while Nighteye was off wiping his arse on a tree somewhere instead of evacuating Kamino. All Might sent back a text telling him he wasn’t interested in talking, but that caused more of the fucking things.” Shaking his head, Bakugou’s teeth were exposed while he panted for air. “So I got All Might to block his number and to filter his email.”

“I take that it wasn’t very successful.”

“Nope. Fucker used burner phones and email addresses. Didn’t matter what we blocked, he changed fucking accounts on the regular and kept sending shit.” Gritting his teeth, Sansa could’ve mistaken the interview for occurring with a malfunctioning cheese grater than a UA student.

“Finally, that brings us to today. What did you see that I didn’t?” That was a lot coming from the guy with the best view of the crowd. Yagi must’ve been preoccupied to miss the telltale warning signs of someone trying to jump a stage. Yagi didn't seem like the preoccupied type... but Nighteye had basically said an Amber Alert was a waste of time and that was enough to piss off most of the police.

“It wasn’t what he did, it’s what he fucking said.”

“And what did he say?”

“That if he couldn’t make All Might explain why he was wasting his time on a nobody then he’d have to ask the next best source up close and in person,” the boy explained in a low, fiery rumble. “Then he jumped the stage and I was right fucking behind him. Cracked him once in the face so he couldn’t get to you and another time to keep him down. I don’t know why he jumped the stage, but I don’t think it was for polite fucking discussion.” No, Bakugou did have a point, most

people didn't jump stages for polite conversation with those already on the stage. Usually it was for more tangible expressions of emotion. If Bakugou wasn't lying about those texts and Sansa had little reason to believe he was lying about them, then Sir Nighteye was in for an extremely bad week.

"You acted in defence of another. It was a close call, but it's been decided that you only used your Quirk to ascend the stage as opposed to striking Sir Nighteye with it. I'm prepared to let you off with a warning due to your cooperation with us in this this stalking matter," Yagi rattled off prompt and business-like to Bakugou who sighed and whispered his thanks.

Sansa couldn't hear anyone else breathing in the room. A warning? Was this the same person?

"I wish it hadn't happened like that, but there wasn't anything else I could do. No one was expecting him to jump the stage..." Bakugou trailed off and shrugged. Maybe not remorse, but at least his heart was in the right place.

Sansa could only watch poetry in motion.

"Thank you for your time, Bakugou. But please, next time this happens? Report it to the police before you have to punch someone out." Pleasant, chipper, like he was having tea with a buddy.

"I'll try, Mr Yagi.

"Good boy."

And the door slammed shut behind them.

"What the fuck was that?"

Sansa shrugged. "Yagi always did hate people who attacked kids." It was weird... but none of them had seen him a witness statement before.

"The fuck. Why isn't he working with juvenile offenders?"

"Because," Tsukauchi said from a shadow, "he also hates kids who attack other kids."

"Shit me."

Just another day in the office. Sansa was going to miss Yagi when he

retired. Not much could bulldoze police red tape, but he definitely had talent. It was going to be a shame when he was gone. No one had been this proactive for years until he came along to whip them into shape.

Yagi was the All Might of policing whether he looked like it or not.

There was no easy manner of raising this topic of discussion the doctor knew, no way to break the ice. But he didn't have time and nor did Midoriya. Time was running out both in the long run and for when Sensei would be back. "Midoriya," he started. "Sensei has spoken to you about your condition?"

"You mean that I'm dying," Midoriya bluntly responded without even turning his attention to him.

"You seem... rather up front about the whole affair," the doctor sank his bait into the waters. What were Midoriya's views? What did he think? "One would think someone your age would take it rather badly to know such information."

Sitting up from his resting position, Midoriya turned an uncanny, unblinking stare onto the doctor. "How do you expect me to react?"

In all honesty... not like that. "I was expecting... more concern," he finished lamely. Like a normal person who had died and felt lucky to be alive.

"I've already died once, doctor. I doubt the next time's going to be any different in the technicalities. The worst part was coming back in the first place." Coming back against his will no less.

...

What could he even say to that? The last person Sensei had pulled out from under a building hadn't been so... pragmatic about their death. At least not enough to comment on it, the futility of the fear of death.

"You don't know what to say to that, do you?" Midoriya asked with a sigh.

The doctor shook his head. "No... the other people he's saved from similar fates don't usually converse after he's rescued them."

“From the buildings he dropped on them in the first place?” Midoriya asked, dully with the sort of interest people take in drying paint. Dealing with Midoriya was nothing like Shigaraki. Shigaraki had emotion and feeling versus Midoriya who... was entirely uncaring about everything raised with an almost honed apathy.

“Usually, yes,” the doctor confirmed. It wasn’t going to hurt to be on the boy’s good side or whatever passed for it. He had to be genuine, for everyone’s sake.

“Can’t say I’m surprised. He’s like a vulture, but with less ethics.”

Not replying, the doctor shifted on his feet. This wasn’t the conversations he was here to have, even if they were breaking the ice. Midoriya wasn’t fond of him and the doctor was... apprehensive of Midoriya to say the least. His Quirk was dangerous.

The words were weighing on his tongue. To give away Sensei’s secret and enlighten Midoriya or to have everyone suffer in an outcome only one of the parties desired. The latter would end in disaster. Midoriya would wake up who knows how far into the future, with no one around the situation would repeat and all that time would be wasted over a boy who didn’t appreciate or accept what was being offered.

The doctor made up his mind. It was for the best.

“There’s something you have to know...” The doctor trailed off.

“Something the old man doesn’t want me to know about?” Midoriya cut in with his unnatural shrewdness. Shigaraki was never this quick to the mark. If only Sensei had meddled sooner rather than taking his time and maybe it wouldn’t have had to end in such a manner. Maybe it would have been different.

“Yes. Sensei acquired a Quirk... specifically for you.” Midoriya’s straightening posture said it all. The doctor had his attention where Quirks were involved. “In light of the severity of your injuries and his... reluctance to risk damaging your mental faculties.... he acquired a Suspended Animation Quirk to mitigate any risks of non-recovery within a normal time frame,” the doctor blurted out as fast as he could - he was free! All he had to do was stick the landing.

Midoriya inclined his head. “So that was the great plan? Stretch it out until he couldn’t then mount me on a wall like an ornament?” He blinked. “I’m not surprised,” but there was a tenseness to his voice that the doctor hadn’t heard before. “Then what do you suggest?”

That edge was still present, a blade hiding under the surface of still waters. Was Midoriya upset? It'd be a perfectly normal response. The doctor had certainly been no small amount of upset when Bakugou had informed him of what Sensei was planning under the table. Perhaps Bakugou didn't know what was truly going on, but that nugget of information was the only thing that had saved him from his original fate. Thankfulness that a piece of the puzzle had finally been filled in and he could act to mitigate Sensei's overtly involved behaviour.

"If...if you want to escape Suspended Animation, I would suggest... leaving yourself in a state that can't be suspended any further," the doctor squirmed, though there was no way Sensei's sensors would know the exact conversation points. They'd had many uncomfortable and biting conversations in the past. This was merely another one. "You're not too far off that state now," the doctor added when Midoriya's face failed to move.

"I understand... it's not the first time I've had that recommendation," and there was the faintest of pained smiles, as if the mere act of moving his facial muscles strained him. Izuku Midoriya was not accustomed to smiling. Not at all. But was accustomed to people telling him to kill himself. "And ignored them for years, so why should I listen to you?"

And a thread of tension somewhere within snapped with a happy PING.

"Because Sensei is being unreasonable! He's always been unreasonable in relation to you and has never explained why," exploded from the doctor in a frenzy. "None of the Noumu are permitted to harm you, but he won't say why. He warned Shigaraki off from you, but he refused to obey and Sensei became less interested in helping him. He ordered my grandson's modification for failing in his task of looking out for you, for having too much free will and once he was converted he finally acted the way he was meant to in the first place. Then Stain killed him for doing what he was meant to do." He couldn't stop. He couldn't help himself. Midoriya had to understand! Before it was too late to intervene! "Sensei won't allow you to die and stay dead. He'll keep dragging you back until you want to stay here!" The doctor finished with an emphatic swipe of his hand. "But you'll never want to stay here so it's pointless! All that suffering for nothing!" For an event that would never and could never happen.

"Your grandson...?" Midoriya was repeating slowly, his eyes widened,

his body stiff.

“Yes, one of the orphan children we use for materials if they’re suitable.” They didn’t have time for this discussion now. They were running out of time. “He was converted because of his inability to follow orders and instead participated in Bakugou’s treatment of you. Sensei was very displeased with his behaviour and was rather more disappointed about losing Bakugou as the ringleader.” Extremely displeased was putting it mildly. Muscular had taken the brunt of Sensei’s aggression since then, though why Sensei had exposed himself to another risk was beyond the doctor’s understanding.

“So he knew all along…” Midoriya murmured to himself, his eyes still wide, his hands flexing irritably in a familiar mannerism that only made the doctor hurry faster. “I knew he was stalking me but…” But clearly not the full extent. It was almost a relief to know that the doctor wasn’t the only one in this boat being lied to about the reason for Sensei’s actions.

“Do you see now why you should take the opportunity while you have it? Do you want to spend centuries frozen until the right Quirk is found to heal you?”

Midoriya had to understand. He was intelligent. He wasn’t stupid, but he had to die. Midoriya was never born to live a long life, no matter how much Sensei insisted otherwise. Sensei was attached to someone who didn’t exist and would never exist because Izuku Midoriya was too real and to change him was to kill him anyway as Sensei was already aware.

While the doctor normally had a policy regarding Sensei’s every whim, in this case it was truly a mercy for both of them for Izuku Midoriya’s life to be ended as peacefully and quickly as possible, before something terrible and unnecessary happened to any of them.

Was a decision really a decision when you needed almost no time to think it through? This felt more like some long dormant instinct than any educated response. The primal reptilian part of his brain which housed all of his unconscious brain functions, which, only for a moment, had leveraged control over the rest of him. Moved him without any strings.

How many children had Tsubasa stolen?

How many people had he experimented on?

How many others never made it to middle school because society wouldn't miss them?

For how long had All For One given his royal assent for every atrocity that came and left their labs?

For how long had All For One been in the habit of pulling corpses from beneath buildings and forcing them to live again to his tune?

For how long had All For One been planning to preserve Izuku's mostly dead body for his own amusement? No wonder he thought he had all the time in the world, because he did between Suspended Animation and his Longevity Quirks. Enough time to keep Izuku nearby while he waited for the right Quirk.

Had that always been his plan?

Is that why the doctor wasn't told about Suspended Animation?

Because he wouldn't approve of All For One's inefficiency and distraction?

How many people had they killed?

How many people had they delivered to a fate worse than death?

How many lives had they ruined?

For how long?

And for what?

For Tsubasa to feel like his miserable life torturing children and petty criminals meant something?

For All For One to pretend that he was anything but a fading myth of the internet who wasted his time in a petulant feud with his brother's successors?

What was the point?

...

But that was the point itself, was it not?

There was no point.

There was two selfish people who preyed on others for their own amusement.

That was it.

And there was Izuku.

Filled with something that burned and made his bones creak under an invisible pressure.

An energy that made him stand and stalk over to Tsubasa.

Tsubasa who was helpless.

Paralysed.

Mouth open, eyes rolling frantically.

No sound emerged.

“Thank you,” Izuku said serenely.

And there was no decision.

Only the most logical course of action.

He lifted a pulsating fist and lunged.

And he saw red.

The doctor had made a mistake. His lungs were being crushed by a phantom grip.

All he could do was watch Midoriya stalk towards him.

Step by step.

Under an invisible force that was either adrenaline or a power more eldritch, Midoriya’s feet found their way.

Midoriya hadn’t known about the source of the experiments, yet the doctor had told him.

Midoriya hadn’t known about the disappearance of the young

Tsubasa, yet the doctor had told him.

Midoriya hadn't known about Suspended Animation, yet the doctor had told him.

He couldn't shout. He couldn't breath. He couldn't lift a hand to ward the boy off and even then, he had no way to compete with the raw strength of the boy's Quirk.

Then Midoriya paused before him.

"Thank you," Midoriya stated simply, serenely, as if he'd been gifted with a deeper answer to life.

His arm lifted, leveraging backwards.

The doctor's life flashed before his eyes.

Dying wasn't the easy part.

Coming back was the hard part.

He watched.

Bones breaking.

Bones crumbling.

Flesh, ligaments and muscles tear themselves from anchor points.

Organs beginning to collapse.

He warped.

The unflinching expression, the lack of the remorse, the apathy to the alarms firing in his head. The pain that should have crippled the boy.

One hand paralysing the boy with the softest touch.

The doctor who cowered, unable to move.

The alarms were still blaring. Why wasn't it enough? Why wasn't intercepting the nerves enough?

Bones were being forced aside. Something dark rippled under the skin of Izuku's arms and exploded out in a surge of energy. Writhing

around him, flaring, extending threads that forced their way back through the vulnerable flesh.

Search screamed.

The boy moved again, flesh that wasn't his own moving the jaw.

A puppet under strings of his own making.

A doll given life, held together by purpose.

His arms strained against Izuku's own which were rearing, inching backwards.

"Let me go."

"You'll die if I do."

"I'll die regardless of what you do."

"You're in pain."

He watched.

"I've had worse."

And he believed it.

The energy sparked and leapt forwards.

So close, too close, there was a pulse.

Then Izuku slumped.

He pulled the pin. Suspended Animation acted as advertised.

Izuku wouldn't have survived the recoil, his bones were already powder.

There was no choice.

No decision to be made.

He tried to tell himself that Izuku would wake up... even though the threads holding him together had disappeared.

His anchor to life had faded with the loss of the strings.

He would wake up.

He had to wake up.

To think Midoriya of all people had One For All. The Quirk with which Sensei was struggling to compete in the centuries long war. But this wasn't the Quirk Sensei remembered... so what... what was it? It was no mere strength enhancement. An explosion of strings and threads that... threaded Midoriya's devastated body beyond the point of death. What Quirk would be so far past the point of Singularity that it... that it... turned its wielder into a marionette?

Who was pulling the strings when Midoriya attacked? Was it Midoriya himself? Was it the Quirk? Was it some amalgamation of both?

What had Sensei created?

Why was it so filled with rage and malice? Or was it Midoriya himself lashing out at life?

Was this why he hadn't been so open about the boy having it in the first place? What had happened in those intervening years to cause... this... thing... This thing attached to a child who was happy to directly end their lives the moment it proved expedient to do so.

"He's not suicidal," Sensei murmured. Perhaps to convince himself. The doctor hoped he could be excused for his manifest lack of belief in that statement. His heart was still pounding even hours after they'd been assessing the damage Midoriya had inflicted upon himself. Nothing about those injuries suggested a contemplative approach to self care. To the contrary, how Midoriya managed to speak with his entire jaw as a fine powder, as shown by the MRI and was enough for the doctor to have his right to doubt. Would anyone who wasn't suicidal do that to themselves willingly?

"Sensei," the doctor said carefully, weighing his tongue. "He... he tried to kill himself, Sensei." And the Quirk that Sensei made (couldn't remove) helped him do it.

Why else would Midoriya have lashed out the way he did with the information he'd been given? The doctor gave him an out and Midoriya had taken it with gusto. Sensei had to realise that the boy wasn't... Midoriya wasn't well and that went well beyond the damage to his bones and organs. Midoriya had far deeper rooted problems that

weren't easily addressed with the right Quirk and Trigger.

Midoriya whose shattered body lay carefully covered up to his neck before them. Midoriya who minced his bones and organs with a Quirk beyond his physical limits. Midoriya who felt every single bone pop and twist and buckle. Every tendon snap, every muscle. And his solution? Use One For All to force a completion, while he remained in the agony of his body shutting down around. Midoriya who said he'd had worse.

"Your mistake, doctor, is making the assumption that Izuku in anyway cared enough to consider his life as a mitigating factor." Sensei muttered, nearly to himself. "You're an asset. Him destroying that asset would, in the long term, damage my ability to freely act." Sensei inhaled and exhaled. "And... if destroying the asset buckled every bone in his body and left him a brain dead vegetable... well, so be it." There was a tremor to Sensei that didn't carry to his voice. "Suicidal people think the world will be better off without them. Reckless people don't stop to think or care about what the world will do they're gone. They do it anyway, not caring about the consequences."

"But..." Weren't they the same thing anyway? "I don't see how there's a difference in this instance, Sensei." Midoriya's bones were no less broken and he was no more coherent. The outcome was the same.

"Think of it as a points system. He kills himself and earns no points. If he kills you he earns a hundred points and if he kills me he wins the game. A default victory." Low, hissing, Sensei continued. "And if he wins the game then who cares if he lost his life to do it? Killing himself serves no purpose. But... if he pays the ultimate price for an outcome he deems adequate, then why not?" Sensei's hand was flexing open and shut. "Izuku is content with dying, so long as he takes one of us with him. His life doesn't matter to him."

"Why? He won't be around to enjoy it." It was unfathomable, like most acts centred around heroics were and always would be in the doctor's eyes. Why do something when no immediate benefit can be reaped or experienced? Why throw his life away for an abstract concept?

"I doubt that's a consideration either, doctor," All For One quietly stated, "when he doesn't seemed to have enjoyed living it in the first place. Perhaps his calculation and analysis of the outcome brought him more satisfaction than living it ever could. He enjoyed the theory more than he ever could its practical."

Shuffling his feet, the doctor could concede that there were a few pieces of evidence he couldn't have foreseen. Izuku Midoriya inability to care about the thoughts of others or even his own wellbeing were among them. "Then what do we do with someone who values our deaths over his own life?" Midoriya was even more dangerous than previously assumed. Midoriya who was willing to level the entire building and everyone in it for a chance at killing both of them. Even Shigaraki wasn't so ambitious, so dangerous.

"We wait," came the resigned reply. "Though I doubt anything will change once he wakes up. Suicide is an emotional affair. What Izuku did is more akin to forensic accounting. He balanced the pros, the cons, completed the final balance sheet and expected outcome..." Sensei paused, and breathed again. "Then he signs off for the day, having permanently ended his employment with its completion. One can use emotion to argue against emotion. Nothing competes with the forensic accountant's tallying of the books."

So detached, so normalised that when the doctor peered closer at Midoriya that he could see the picture forming. A picture of someone who wilfully undertook employment where there was no expectation that would come home from one day to the next and thought that it was perfectly fine. Midoriya wanted a cheap state funeral, his ashes to be tossed out to sea and... for life to keep going as if it was resuming from a short, unexpected pause. As if his death meant nothing and, perhaps to him, it truly did mean nothing.

"We can't save him, Sensei," the doctor replied. "He... he doesn't want to be saved." He wanted the world to keep on spinning with or without him... a level of indifference that would've cowed even Shigaraki's madness.

"Tomura and Izuku truly are polar opposites." Sensei lifted his hands and weighed them like a scale. "Tomura who does everything he can to preserve himself even with no meaningful existence in sight. Tomura who hates everyone yet still seeks their attention and validation for his acts. Izuku who makes no attempt to save himself despite the responsibility he's been given and the future that awaits him. Izuku who doesn't care for the opinions of others but helps anyway to suit his own purpose." Sensei's bitter cough could have counted as a laugh. "Tomura would've been thrilled to be helped yet again, but Izuku resents the interference. Has always resented those around him telling him what's best for him when they know nothing about him in the first place." Sensei lowered his head. "I'm no more privileged than anyone else in this regard."

“He doesn’t trust us.” The doctor hoped it was tactful enough, but Sensei was... unsteady... in more ways than one.

What the doctor got back in response was an uncharacteristic smile. No teeth, no glee... nothing. “That only makes us the same as everyone else on the planet. He doesn’t trust anyone. Not his parents, not All Might, not his teachers nor classmates... nor does he have any friends to trust either.” Reality wasn’t fair. Reality was that even All Might with his lack of a social life had found safe keepers for the the knowledge of One For All. Izuku Midoriya, from what they knew, hadn’t told anyone and would take his personal knowledge with him to the grave. No one held that confidence.

The doctor watched Sensei reach out a hand to tuck Midoriya’s sheets in, only to realise partway through that the boy was too fragile for any contact. The solution was failing, his bones taking far too long to heal, almost as if it was being resisted, but Midoriya didn’t have those abilities. Midoriya’s stress levels might assist Trigger, but that was pointless when those same stress levels were hampering his body’s natural ability to heal.

“Sensei...” The doctor swallowed. Dry and heavy, it was finally time. “He hasn’t got much longer left.”

“And now nor do you for betraying my trust and damaging his already frail body,” Sensei hissed and and the doctor felt the chills reverberate in his bones. No, this wasn’t happening. “First… we’ll begin with who told you about the Suspended Animation Quirk…” It couldn’t be happening.

“I was trying to help, Sensei.” *Nonononononono.*

Sensei laughed, rough maniacally and lacking essential mirth. “Funny doctor, that’s what my comrades said before my brother died. They were only. Trying. To. Help,” he bit out each word and sprayed them across the room.

“But not to worry, doctor, you can still be of some use to me.”

Sensei grinned, hovering over Midoriya’s shattered resting place.

And the doctor didn’t doubt Sensei for a second.

Chapter End Notes

It's all downhill from here.

Memoriam

Chapter Summary

In memory...

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Shouto had a sneaking suspicion that he was in trouble. In one hand, he held a bunch of flowers, in the other, he gripped his father's wrist which had been only inches away from him. Of all the times and all the places, this had to be the worst and Shouto's stoney silence didn't seem to be getting the hint across either that it really wasn't the time or place. Endeavor never was good with basic social skills, but this was taking it to new and detached places.

"Shouto, please!" The old man was… weird. Not weird in the usual manner Shouto was expecting either, where he was an inch away from a volcanic eruption. Not the sort of explosive response he had to his wife's hospitalisation. No, Shouto has seen this once before… at a funeral for a person he hardly knew and wouldn't ever know because of his father.

"What do you want, you bastard?" Shouto ground out from clenched teeth. Endeavor's grip slackened and the man let go. Maybe he realised that causing a scene in the middle of a florist for picking memorial flowers wouldn't be the best idea for his agency's PR. Neither had hospitalising his wife, but with enough money and threats no one was going to comment about her disappearance.

"I understand that you've been distressed by what happened to Midoriya," Endeavor began and Shouto immediately felt his rage wind back into a suspicion that lurked beneath the water like a shark. "But," Endeavor's voice wavered, "circumstances have changed since you… took a break and we need to talk."

"Like?" Shouto hadn't heard anything that would change any circumstances. In another sense, things had changed alright. Endeavor never had this much tact before Midoriya… went away. In fact, he should've been chewing Midoriya out for weakness, saying that Shouto ought to be better in every conceivable manner. Not this, though. This was a hard swerve into an attempt at tactfulness that

Shoutou hadn't ever thought Endeavor capable of in theory let alone practice. Was the old dog learning new tricks?

"Midoriya's mother asked me to help arrange his memorial," Endeavor answered, his face twisted with… something raw and unidentifiable Shouto never wanted to see again for the rest of his life. He almost, for that moment, could've passed for a human being. If only he wasn't such a bastard. "She was the one who told me that you were here."

Shouto resolved never to tell Inko Midoriya anything else as long as he lived.

"Don't blame her, Shouto," Endeavor interjected with an unsettling amount of accuracy. "She asked me to help with the memorial after… what happened to Touya and since your mother was… unavailable," Endeavor concluded, his face twisting and distorting.

Shouto stared. He'd almost forgotten that the bastard had been the one to bury Touya, even though Touya had hated the bastard as much as the rest of them. Touya who was also dead.

"And? What does this have to do with me?" Shouto asked with clenched teeth. The flowers had to be picked sooner rather than later. The memorial wasn't too far away now. Endeavor was wasting his time.

"I think…" Endeavor swallowed and Shouto stared. "I think we need to discuss this in a quieter location. The park?" And Shouto nodded, glancing around to see if he could spot the telltale signs of Endeavor's sidekicks. Nope, it appeared all clear. He could escape from Endeavor, but a whole agency was pushing his luck. After this he could go back to picking flowers.

"Be quick." He set the flowers down at the counter. "I'll be back soon," he said to the florist who was elbow deep in a bouquet of poppies.

Without another word, Endeavor left and Shouto gingerly followed him to the nearby park. They didn't run, but every tensed muscle in Endeavor's back screamed of an urgency that Shouto hadn't seen in years.

Arriving at the desolate area, Shouto perched on the edge of the park bench with no small amount of reluctance. If Endeavor tried anything, Shouto was game to to do a runner. Endeavor perched next to him and Shouto felt the seat begin to buckle. All he could do was wait.

“For the longest time, I gave up hope,” Endeavor began and Shouto was pinned by the wording. Endeavor never discussed hope. Ever. There was no physical force, no flames, no rage, but… Shouto didn’t want to call it what he thought it was, because it’d be giving Endeavor too much credit.

“Touya was gone. There’s no bringing back the dead so I made offerings to his shrine every day in the hope that he was at peace.” There was a strangled note cording itself around Endeavor’s voice and Shouto’s increasing suspicion that the unnamed emotion was about to make a break for it and escape was only growing stronger. “I left his room exactly as it was to keep his memory alive even though the flesh was gone.” Shouto studiously ignored the bead of water creeping down Endeavor’s face. “My response to what happened to Midoriya was inappropriate and I apologise for belittling his memory. From my own experiences, I should have known better and made allowances for what happened to him.”

Shouto stared. And stared. And stared some more. Something was terribly wrong with Endeavor. Endeavor never apologised for anything. Ever. “This isn’t just about Midoriya, is it?” Shouto’s stomach was dropping. Had… someone else died? But if they had, wouldn’t Fuyumi or Natsuo told him about it? This wasn’t adding up.

“There’s something I have to tell you.”

Shouto braced for impact.

“Touya is still alive. When Detective Yagi was interrogating the League of Villains member Dabi, he discovered his true identity.” Endeavor’s head was in his hands and Shouto stopped. His entire world came to a grinding, sliding halt with Shouto being dragged beneath its wheels. It couldn't be.

Shouto slumped back into the bench, his eyes wide, his breath deep. Dabi with the blue fire. Dabi who burned himself. Dabi who mocked him as he took Bakugou away in the forest… Dabi who was… utterly deranged. Dabi who was Touya who was dead.

Dabi.

“They cremated him.” Shouto replied from an age away. It wasn’t possible. It couldn’t be possible. “We saw his ashes.” At his funeral. With Touya’s impeccably maintained shrine in his old room which hadn’t bee touched since his passing. Touya was gone. He had to be dead. If he wasn’t dead, then where had he been? What the hell was

happening?

“They weren’t his ashes,” Endeavor growled, a fist clenching. “The police organised the DNA tests and it’s definitely Touya. Alive, distressed and unwell,” Endeavor spat out. “His mind has been warped by… whatever his saviour did to him. He recognised me, but I didn’t recognise him until I had it practically shoved into my face. He’s been alive all these years and we never knew.”

Shouto twitched, an idea dawning on him, like the realisation one had five minutes into standing on top an ants nest. “Those bastards stole his corpse, didn’t they?” Shouto hissed from between clenched teeth. Was it All For One? He was the only bastard coming to mind for villains into the corpse stealing business. If it was All For One…

“From what the police determined, yes,” Endeavor grunted, the park bench groaning and crumpling under the force of his grip. “His body was taken from the morgue and a replacement was provided for the purpose of cremation.”

Shouto shot to attention. “Some bastard doctor’s been helping All For One,” Shouto snapped, withholding the urge to explode into flame. None of self restraint seemed to be shared with Endeavor’s whose flames were visibly burning brighter. Who else would have access to morgues to steal bodies? That was a doctor’s job through and though.

“We’ll get to him,” Endeavor sharply nodded, “but first let us deal with Midoriya’s memorial. Even if he’s not dead, he should know that he’s not forgotten.” Forgotten like Touya. Midoriya would never be forgotten regardless of what All For One did to him.

“I’m guessing none of us can see Touya yet.” Not that he had to ask. Dabi didn’t come off as the most mentally stable person Shouto had ever seen in his life. If he ever recovered.

“Soon, Shouto, soon.”

Without another word, as though no conversation had ever taken place, they made their way back to the florist. When Endeavor heaped in lilies of the valley into the purported arrangement, Shouto didn’t stop him. Midoriya would’ve waxed poetic about poisonous flowers, like every other deadly thing he came across.

Momo stepped back and carefully arranged the dolls into their

positions. Logically, there wasn't much point in this level of arrangement. The entire structure was going to be burned. Thousands of dolls forming the kanji for Deku with two stylistic bunny ears mounted on top. Every single one of Momo's dolls, her months of erratic creation would fade away into ash and nothingness. Some would call it a waste, but Momo had to have hope. Midoriya was alive. If the police and Bakugou thought he was alive then Momo would hold onto that flame and carry it until Midoriya was returned to them.

In the meantime, with words still beyond her, Momo stood with Ida as he called the first of 1-A's speakers to the stage. Bakugou stomped up the stairs, his face a mask of fury and he came to a halt, death glaring the audience from the podium, without a single piece of paper in sight.

Bracing herself and shoving earplugs into her ears was all Momo could do when Bakugou decided to appropriate the microphone. He opened his mouth and 1-A and 1-B sighed in unison.

"Listen up, shitheads! Deku was the craziest bastard I've ever met. He broke his fucking bones teaching scrubs how to use their Quirks properly and beat his own shit in while beating the shit out of fuckwits. He saved my arse, because I was too fucking stupid to do as I was told and run the fuck away," Bakugou yelled into the mic which blasted across the seating area. Even Present Mic ducked his head.

Meanwhile, her earplugs secured, Momo wished that words would come as easily to her as they did Bakugou. Clearly, as the classmate who had known Midoriya the longest, it was far easier for him to sample experiences that instantly summoned forth memories of Midoriya. Momo didn't have time, but hopefully would once Midoriya returned.

"He's a creepy bastard who spends more time drooling over people's Quirks than actually speaking to them." Bakugou ferally grinned. "And all I can say is good luck to All For One, because now that creepy bastard is your fucking problem and I hope he savages you and your shit Quirk every fucking day for the rest of your miserable, inadequate, useless fucking life. Go fuck yourself and I hope Deku shoves a building up your arse!" Bakugou slammed the mic down in a hiss of static and stalked away.

Ida merely adjusted his glasses, as though Bakugou's few words were nothing of extraordinary note. Perhaps to Ida who'd seen Bakugou at

both his best and worst in recent months, the short speech truly was nothing extraordinary, even if the rest of the audience watched with their jaws agape. “Thank you for those inspirational words, Bakugou.”

“Inspirational? What the hel- ouch!” A voice cried from the back.

“Shut up, Monoma,” another voice hissed and Momo smothered down a smile.

Someone was within UA. Someone who was snooping along the corridors without a single care in the world. Careless, reckless, maybe stupid. With Midoriya’s memorial being held on the school campus, it was only a matter of time before the teacher sounded the alarm and the entire congregation came running. It was a bad time to be breaking into UA. Everyone being so highly strung, so tense, everyone looking for a person to blame. Looking for anyone to blame. The teacher pitied the poor bastard who was the target of their fury.

“Come La Brava! This way!” A male voice called and a female one answered.

“Coming, Gentle!” The woman (girl?) called back with no attempt at subtlety or stealth.

This wasn’t the usual crowd. The usual crowd were still enjoying the tender mercies of All Might last the teacher heard. No, these people were new. No one with half a brain in their head would be here today without a good reason. There wasn’t any clout in invading a dead kid’s funeral.

The teacher heard them scuttle around a corner and peeked out himself. He caught a set of coattails as they entered the school’s server room and winced. Why the hell would these two want the servers? Carefully, ever so carefully, the teacher positioned himself next to the doorway and listened.

“Ah, here it is,” the male (Gentle?) exclaimed. “You can plug in here, La Brava and we’ll have what we need in no time.” What they needed, huh? What could possibly interest the average criminal about UA’s records and servers? It could be sold to the highest bidder, but that attracted all sorts of attention from the authorities that no regular criminal could handle. So they were either idiots or they weren’t garden variety villains.

“Is it right to do this, though?” La Brava, wondered aloud. Right? Since when had villains ever wondered about anything they did being right? “There’s not much left of this kid as it is.” Metaphorical alarms exploded in the teacher’s head.

“Our benefactor was very specific, La Brava. The sooner Midoriya’s records are erased, the sooner we can be off.” The teacher replayed the words in his head. The sooner Midoriya’s records are erased… “It’s not for us to question him. We were paid to do a job and here we are.” The teacher heard a gentle clink of what might have been fine china.

They were erasing Midoriya. Why? Why were they deleting Midoriya’s records? Sensei still needed them. Who would have the motivation to access Midoriya’s records? Midoriya’s records which kept him alive at UA. Midoriya who would cease to exist entirely at UA once they gone. His empty seat would be marked vacant for any other student to fill its place. Midoriya would be permanently gone from the daily routine and memory of UA.

“During his memorial though? Why couldn’t we do this any other day?” La Brava audibly sighed to her partner in crime. “Why something this extreme? The poor kid hardly has anyone as it is.” No one to remember him, which is likely why Sensei took his body. No one to miss him when he was gone.

“Sensei was rather specific that it be done today while the school is distracted. It’s not in the best taste, but the last thing we need is for any of the staff to make a surprise appearance,” Gentle replied and the teacher’s head pulsed. “You’ve dealt with the surveillance so I don’t foresee us having any issues.”

Sensei…

Sensei was…

Sensei was rather specific that it be done today…

The teacher paused. Sensei? This was Sensei’s plan? Why… why hadn’t Sensei told him about erasing Midoriya’s records? He’d gone to so much effort, taken so many risks and now… now they being deleted… for what purpose? For what? Why? Why now?

Why would Sensei go to so much effort to preserve what he could of Midoriya, only to throw it all away? Unless… unless Sensei had found what he needed and Midoriya wasn’t required anymore. The teacher almost felt sorry for the kid. Sensei had what he needed, now the kid

was going to be erased from memory at the one place that was going to hold a memorial for him in spite of the press release. Shame, but that's life. If the kid had survived the building fall, he wouldn't have been in whatever situation he was now. Sensei wasn't exactly clear on the details and the teacher wasn't about to pry for more information. The less he knew the better at this point.

Tuning out the two villains, the teacher slunk away to keep a lookout for the unlikely pair who were crazy enough to break into UA during Midoriya's memorial. Like Gentle had said, it wasn't for them to question Sensei's motivations. They did as they were told and left it all to him and his lifetime of experience.

Instead, he waited for twenty minutes before ducking into a cleaning storeroom to let them pass back out their original out of the way back entrance. Once the footsteps and voices were no longer within hearing range, he allowed ten minutes to pass before he slipped out the same way to resume his patrol.

The teacher stepped through the doorway and slammed into an invisible barrier. Recoiling, it hurled him backwards onto his rear and his ears rung while a tiny girl and goateed man stared from above.

"Good day, Mr Traitor. We are today's entertainment," he leered through the invisible barrier while the girl snapped away with her phone.

Behind him, an explosion sounded. Familiar and ever so close.

"Oi arsehole, where the fuck do you think you're going?"

Hearing Bakugou's dulcet tones, the teacher could only freeze.

Shouta watched Vlad slam into Gentle Criminal's rubber barrier with no small amount of satisfaction. It wasn't the most tasteful of ideas, but it gave them what they needed for the sting. Midoriya's memorial, entirely coincidentally, was the most airtight alibi the entirety of UA could have while still being plausible. Vlad knew about all of UA's policies. The dirty sneak had been here for long enough to know when staff were being shady. Good thing no amount of teaching experience was enough to know when students were being shady, because Vlad hadn't given a second glance to Yaoyorozu's suggestion of a memorial for Midoriya. Nor had he given a glance to the recommendation that he and a select handful of others patrol the school while everyone else

was occupied.

He also hadn't given a second glance to both 1-A and 1-B's enthusiastic organisation of the event, nor had he noticed Katsuki Bakugou's conspicuous absence once the speech was delivered. Vlad, fortunately, hadn't noticed a great deal of things in recent months, partly due to Bakugou's natural abrasiveness being weaponised to lure Vlad away from any essential areas of the investigation into him.

It went off without a hitch. Gentle and La Brava were the bait and with a single mention of All For One's alias it was as though they'd slammed an override code for the bastard. The cameras caught the exact moment he slunk away, acting as a lookout before he let them escape. The cameras and mics caught everything. Vlad was entirely complicit in the fake scam and absolutely nothing he could say or do was going to let him wriggle his way out of this one. Now all they had to do was finish closing the trap.

"Oi arsehole, where the fuck do you think you're going?" Bakugou's hands sparked wildly.

At one end of the corridor sat Gentle's barrier with its leering guardians blocking the escape.

At the other end stood Shouta, Bakugou and Todoroki, with the hallway behind them fully barricaded with a wall of ice, Quirk nullification and the threat of an explosive and painful death.

Shouta's eyes burned red as he stared Vlad down. Vlad who was now Quirk free and at the mercy of his students.

"You know what, brats? Go for it." Shouta leaned back and the first blow connected before the words had even left his mouth. Vlad explosively bounced off Gentle's barrier straight into Todoroki's fiery fist and detonated a second time, before he was caught by Bakugou's speeding boot and the cycle repeated.

Bounce. Crunch. Boom. Bounce. Bounce. Crunch.

Vlad hit the ground with a wet splatter of melted ice and blood. Shouta casually strode over to him. "So Vlad, was it worth it?"

"Worth… what?" Vlad sputtered, blood spilling from his mouth.

"Wrong answer!" Shouta drove a precision boot into Vlad's face and he bonelessly slumped into a growing pool of blood and freezing

water. “Good work, kids.”

“Pfft. Let’s give this bastard to Mr Yagi already,” Bakugou was impatiently tapping a foot and Shouta obligingly tied Vlad up.

Shouta would do it again.

For Shirakumo and Midoriya who both perished saving kids from falling rubble.

Inky blackness. It was comforting, at least compared to what came before. All For One and Tsubasa’s experiments… his first death, now the second. Eerily silent for the first time in recent memory. It was almost comforting. There was no weird creak in his bones, no strange sensations that existed disconnected from any pain, no smothering presence of the doctor and All For One. There was a blissful void he could be in without having to see them ever again.

At least until whatever came next. If anything ever came next. Izuku would know it when he saw it, because there wasn’t any need to rush anymore. He could wait.

Then Izuku blinked and stared, a figure appearing in the sea of black.

And a bald man was staring back, his eyes wide and his teeth biting his lip. Then he spoke. “Don’t ya think what ya did was a little bit on the extreme side?”

“Not really,” Izuku shrugged and jumped a foot into the air as he heard the words reverberate back into his own ears. Izuku’s eyes shot downwards to see a full fleshed out body. So that’s what it took to fully manifest within One For All. Death. Maybe that’s why All Might was still so misty compared to… compared to everyone else in here. At least Izuku had solid evidence that All Might hadn’t been killed by All For One yet.

The bald man was frowning. “You know what you’ve done, right?” As if that meant anything to Izuku at this point in time. Izuku knew what he hadn’t done and that was the important part. The doctor was still breathing when Izuku took his last gulp of air through perforated and bleeding lungs. Izuku had failed… but at least All For One wasn’t getting anything out of him either. Not after what the doctor had confessed. The lives they’d ruined, the people they killed and experimented on… No, this was for the best by all indications. It

would've been better with the doctor or All For One permanently removed from the equation, but this would have to do. If only to stop anyone from having ideas about kicking in All For One's front door and to stop any of All For One's own ideas about what to do with a living One For All wielder.

Izuku nodded without feeling much of anything towards the subject matter. "I've already died once." And oddly enough that first death still wasn't enough to fully stockpile Izuku into One For All. In Izuku's first vision, he'd only been a phantom observing All For One's memories. Now… now he was just as real as the rest of the ghosts. And just as dead. Izuku had clearly been more thorough than All For One's building drop if he had manifested entirely within the Quirk now. Not that One For All should exist anymore. Quirks died with their wielders and One For All shouldn't be any different.

"Kid…" The ghost was struggling to speak and Izuku let him work his way towards whatever he wanted to say. There was no need to rush. "You're…" The ghost gestured with his head and bit his lip again. "You know." *Dead*, Izuku silently filled in, feeling more confused than anything else about the Quirk's reaction. They were dead too. This shouldn't be a surprise when All For One had killed the rest of them.

"I was already dead," Izuku pointed out. "All of you have already died. I'm not special." The only case where Izuku was part of the norm of things. They might have been dead people, but One For All was proving that they were still people nonetheless. Only people had problems with discussing death in Izuku's experience. Sentient Quirks tended to be more distant with the topic in Izuku's research and dealings with Tokoyami's Quirk. There was an unusually human element to this conversation that was making Izuku's skin crawl. Too tangible, too real. Too familiar.

"That's all you have to say? You don't care?" His face was scrunched up, his brow furrowed and Izuku didn't pretend to know what the former wielder meant by "care". "You used Black Whip to crush yourself out of reality… and that's it? You don't care that you're dead?" Well, it seemed that One For All thought Izuku was dead too. At least there was some closure.

But Black Whip… Was Black Whip another Quirk? Were those black threads part of One For All? If One For All had the personality of each wielder imbued within it, then wasn't it logical for it to have their Quirks? All For One's stolen stockpile Quirk had supposedly merged with his brother's Quirk and… in hindsight… meant that One For All

itself must've had the ability to eat Quirks in the first place for it to even merge with the brother's Quirk.

Izuku shoved his tangential thoughts aside and shrugged (there was always later, after all). "What did you expect me to do with most of my organs already failing?" What could Izuku have possibly done to All For One in particular? All For One was still capable of holding his own against All Might in spite of his injuries. Izuku was in far more pieces than All Might, struggling to breathe and walk, nevermind taking on All For One in anything resembling a fight. There was no tactical position where Izuku could've won.

"That's not what I mean, kid," the Quirk said glumly. "Why didn't ya wait?"

Izuku blinked.

"Wait for what? For him to use me as a bait to kill All Might?" Because that was the reality of All For One. Petty, malicious, incapable of letting a grudge go in any capacity. Izuku would've been kept there long enough to lure All Might in then disposed of once the deed was done. Izuku wasn't delusional enough to believe that All For One had the capacity to prioritise anything else. Izuku was a distraction while All For One prepared for the real prize. "I'm not taking part in that."

"No, kid, why didn't ya wait for someone to save you?" One For All insisted. "Why couldn't you hold on for a bit longer?" Oh, that made more sense. Sorta. One For All was expecting Izuku to be saved by someone. An understandable mistake to make.

"No one was coming to save me," Izuku shook his head. "No one could have saved me with All For One being so… strange." Strange was a nice way for Izuku to avoid thinking about All For One's clingy behaviour, like Izuku was a new kitten that someone had bought for him that he was unable to put down for any period of time. In order to get to Izuku, they had to prise All For One off first and Izuku couldn't see that happening without One For All. All Might was running on fumes, there were still Noumu to deal with and there was absolutely no doubt in Izuku's mind that his body, alive or dead, wouldn't be given up without a fight. No one left had the toolkit to directly contend with All For One. Perhaps if they poisoned him or threw Midnight at him, they'd have a better chance, but from what Izuku had seen at Kamino, even that wouldn't be enough. All For One would blow the entire area apart and leave, just like he had before in

Kamino.

“So you’re just gonna give up, then.” The shade’s head was bowed. “Is that it? Use my Quirk to kill yourself then step away like you never mattered. You were never alone. You have us.” What did being alone have to do with anything? Izuku had been alone his entire life and having a Quirk that communicated in cryptic riddles didn’t change the last fifteen (or was it sixteen now?) years. At this point in time, Izuku had come to accept his unique social status as being a fact of reality, even though it was unfair. Life wasn’t fair.

Frowning at One For All, Izuku had a distinct sense of off-ness. Something… something was wrong with One For All. “Do I really?” Izuku stuck his hands into imaginary pockets. How long had it been since he last had proper clothing with pockets? Even though none of this was real… “Why show me All For One’s memories?” Izuku fired at the Quirk. “Why not tell me about you having all of the past wielders’ Quirks?”

One For All flinched. “You weren’t ready.” Ready for what? After months of All For One, Izuku knew a deflection when saw it.

Izuku shook his head harder than before. “And now I’m dead and this entire discussion is pointless. Black Whip, right? The tentacles I had?” Izuku didn’t wait for a reply. “Those would’ve been handy to know about before All For One dropped a building on me.” As would knowing about any other Quirks which would’ve meant not being All For One’s captive for a prolonged period of time. Knowing anything about One For All would’ve been a help. All Izuku had learned so far was that All For One had always been scarily possessive of his relatives and that didn’t mean anything now when either a) All For One had killed his own brother or b) his brother had died in some other way. All For One’s brother was still dead and All For One, so many decades later, had an even shorter loaf of bread to his name than he did when his brother was still alive. None of these memories helped Izuku beyond indicating that All For One’s memories lurked in One For All to begin with. Why One For All would even choose to use All For One’s memories instead of his brother’s in the first place was beyond Izuku’s understanding.

“Quirks are stronger with anger, with rage and that’s a perfectly fine source of power,” One For All explained, “but you can lose control when that happens. You need to moderate it! The Black Whip I had is nothing like what you’re using now.” And presumably none of the other Quirks were really the same either, not that Izuku would ever

know about them. “I know you’re upset by what happened,” One For All continued, “but you didn’t have to…” His face crumpled. “You didn’t have to do that to yourself, kid. It’s not worth it.” How was it not worth it when One For All’s purpose was to kill All For One? Why was it prioritising Izuku over its creator given duty?

Speaking to One For All would’ve been a dream come true under any other circumstance, but this was… this was too strange for Izuku’s taste. Quirks weren’t meant to grieve and be secretive. Quirks weren’t meant to be like One For All. Quirks weren’t meant to behave like a person with an agenda.

One For All, his face in darkness, took a step forwards and Izuku immediately took one step back like he was trekking through molasses. This wasn’t normal. This wasn’t right. Izuku had to leave. To get away.

But he was dead. There was no escape. Where could he even go?

“What do you want?” Izuku instead asked, taking another struggling step back, even while One For All continued to advance. What could a Quirk possibly want? What agenda could a Quirk have in the first place? What Quirk could persist after death?

His face still shadowed, One For All come to a halt a step away from Izuku and placed a hand on Izuku’s stiff shoulder. Then another hand fell onto the opposite shoulder. Izuku was dragged forward into a bone crushing embrace, completely blinded, forced into the ghost’s chest, entrapped by hands that didn’t feel like how they appeared to Izuku beforehand.

“I want to save you,” a voice whispered. “Don’t do this to yourself. Please.”

Pleading. It was pleading. The Quirk was *pleading*.

Wrongwrongwrongwrongwrong.

And all Izuku wanted to do was *leave*.

Izuku’s eyes snapped open.

In another world, he gasped and his lungs filled with unnatural air. A mask grated against his face and a soft fabric brushed his temples. Izuku was pinned to another person’s chest, trapped in another embrace.

“Let me save you. Please, Izuku,” All For One murmured, his arms encircling Izuku. “Don’t do this, it’s not worth it.”

Izuku gagged on thin air. Gagged on bile he didn’t know he still had and thrashed in the man’s grip.

He couldn’t shake it. Not the sensation, not the crawling that roamed his skin. Not the deja vu that twisted itself through every single word that came out of All For One’s mouth. Not the arms that wouldn’t release him.

Izuku couldn’t escape that One For All sounded remarkably like All For One.

Chapter End Notes

Typos will be corrected eventually.

Prospective

Chapter Summary

The expected outcome.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Midoriya's prospects were… troubling. Though troubling was perhaps putting it rather more mildly at this point in time. The boy was ridden with restlessness while sleeping and thrashing madness while awake. An incoherent raving mess who was catapulted from nightmare to waking nightmare without an end in sight. His dreams were haunting him from the sounds of the boy's cries, even though he refused to even hint at the topic of what caused such distress. His secrecy was well and truly alive and well, even though it served him no purpose here. It would have been kinder to sedate him in such a state, but Sensei refused.

Of course he refused. Midoriya was already on a teetering seesaw of a cocktail of drugs and Quirks that kept him "living" though the doctor would be hard pressed this state of being "alive". On so many drugs, another would simply worsen whatever brain damage he'd experienced that left him in this tortuous loop of nightmares, waking, attempting to smack himself into unconsciousness before he'd drop then the cycle would repeat. Yes, the boy had awareness, but his lucidity was so infrequent that it would've been far kinder to offer the boy pain relief and let him fade away without the drugs constantly forcing him to mend. Not that Sensei had cared for that suggestion.

"This isn't about your convenience, doctor," Sensei had firmly reminded him. "This occurred due to your lack of judgement. And while my faith in you dwindles day by day… I sincerely hope that you find a resolution… for your sake." And didn't that make the doctor sweat. They'd worked together on numerous projects for years without incident, without question… but this boy… was a wedge that was driving them apart. The boy who'd just as soon kill both of them as soon as he had the means and still Sensei sided with Midoriya.

"I don't understand, Sensei. Why him?" The doctor had requested, though it was more of a demand than a request. Midoriya was placing all of them in danger and was clearly unhinged. The boy was

dangerous, more so than Shigaraki could ever hope to aspire to let alone achieve in his lifespan.

“It’s not your place to know *why*, doctor. This is a matter of my judgement, unless you’re questioning my judgement?” And the doctor could only tremble and shake his head in a silent lie, because all three of them knew that the doctor had done nothing but question Sensei’s judgement. Midoriya was by all account a factor that had done nothing but raise questions about Sensei’s judgement. Sensei who didn’t care for those complaints unless they came from Midoriya himself. Midoriya who had Sensei wrapped around his little finger without even trying.

Certainly, the doctor could take the risk and allow Midoriya to die… But the doctor had spent enough time within his own laboratories and had seen enough of Sensei’s work over the years to know that the punishment would be unending.There would be no reprieve, no easy death, no escape. Persisting, unending torment of the likes Midoriya would never experience. Was it worth the risk? Not really. This loss of time would be worked through at another stage, because Midoriya’s death was almost guaranteed.

Sensei would have to see sense one day. The longer this went on the more the doctor felt a comparison to the dementia ridden patients and their visitors to be accurate. More so in the comparison of Sensei than to Midoriya. Sensei who sat beside Midoriya day by day, holding down flailing arms, whispering comforting words, reminding the boy of where and who he was… it was a familiar experience from clinics from years past. As was Sensei’s increasingly frayed and temperamental behaviour as Midoriya grew more and more docile. Midoriya who day by day was less capable of recognising food let alone eating it. The doctor knew progression when he saw it and Midoriya’s fate was inevitable, even if Sensei’s denial was unable to alter reality.

Midoriya was going to die as a shadow of himself, with irreversible damage that no modern medication could ever hope to correct. And Sensei would let it happen in the vague hope that a solution would present itself, even though such a feat was impossible. Midoriya’s death was guaranteed and could have been peaceful if only Sensei could let go. Now the boy would suffer because of Sensei’s lapse in judgement. This only harmed the man in the long run.

From his position measuring out a solution of Trigger, the doctor could only silently shake his head lest he invite Sensei’s less than

thrilled commentary on the doctor's thought processes. Fortunately Sensei was distracted by Midoriya's broken thoughts.

"You're not a real supervillain," Midoriya slurred, eyes fluttering beneath closed lids.

"Why not, Izuku? Haven't I ruined enough lives to qualify for the title?" Placating and gentle, it was really was no different to how one handled a dementia patient. It even carried the same weight and tremor that the relatives of those with dementia carried with them whenever they entertained the delusions. It didn't matter what nonsense what came from Midoriya's mouth, Sensei prolonged the conversation, whether it be Midoriya's profound and surprising knowledge of gardening, or his uncanny ability to imitate and impersonate others. Sensei played along and for a few hours Midoriya would be in a semblance of peace even while his damaged brain struggled to make sense of his surroundings. It was better than nothing if the objective was Midoriya's comfort. Sensei would certainly never allow a more permanent form of comfort for Midoriya.

"You never stole a Brainwashing Quirk," Midoriya sighed and Sensei's lips twitched upwards. Sensei was completely immersed whatever drivel was about to leave the boy's lips. A Brainwashing Quirk, really?

"Why would I need one, Izuku?" Why indeed? Sensei was more than capable of levelling most of Japan when he put his mind to it. There was no requirement for such a Quirk to be used by the man. It was an insulting suggestion to make in the first place.

"So you can have other people use their Quirks for you," Midoriya answered, his eyes flicking open. "You don't need to know how to heal yourself if you can make someone do it for you… with… none of the risks… of learning…" Midoriya's eyes drooped and with a gentle snore he drifted off into a comfortable sleep that set off a klaxon within the doctor's head that rang and pounded.

Silence. Utter silence. All that remained was the steady breathing of the three people present.

Sensei paused, frozen, unmoving, utterly struck dumb. "Could it be that simple?" He finally whispered. "After all these years… was that really it?" Sensei reached out a hand and caressed Midoriya's sleeping face in a motion that made the doctor shiver. "To think that you had the answer all along… You truly are wasting your gifts on people who don't deserve them." The doctor held his breath. Was what that

simple? What? Why?

“Sensei…” That strange unspoken language that always seemed to pass between them was in full display. The ability for Midoriya to bit by bit poke holes in Sensei’s armour and Sensei returned the favour with gusto. Two people who eerily complemented each other even while they attempted to tear each other limb from limb in their academic debates. Their silent language and shared knowledge that would forever escape the doctor.

“Do you remember Izuku’s matches during the Sports Festival?” Sensei murmured, a hand curling through Midoriya’s hair.

“Yes…” Vaguely. He’d been amazed that the boy had been able to progress so far without requiring a Quirk. He’d done that by… by… by having others use their Quirks for him.

The yen dropped and so did the doctor’s jaw.

“One of his opponents had a Brainwashing Quirk… It’s voice activated if I remember correctly,” Sensei whispered, his hands now fully enveloped in Midoriya’s wild mass of ever growing hair. “Hitsoshi Shinsou’s Quirk… A Quirk he used to advance through the second round by having others use their Quirks to carry him through the round. A Quirk where his personal experience doesn’t matter so long as the Brainwashed does have the experience required.” Sensei’s lips twisted into a feral grin.

“But,” the doctor began, “who…” Who had a Quirk that defied conventional healing? There was Recovery Girl… but Quirks that healed or regenerated were useless to both Sensei and Midoriya. What… what could Brainwashing be used on?

“You know doctor, I wonder how Kai Chisaki’s doing these days… what with his ability to manipulate matter back into whole and healthy states,” Sensei leisurely explained and the doctor’s skin crawled because Sensei was leaning in ever closer to the boy. “They even say he can cheat death and cure all illnesses. Maybe it’s time to pay him and Shinsou a visit in the interests of little Izuku’s endeavours, hmm?” With that, Sensei stood at his looming height, only to stoop and carefully tuck Midoriya deeper into his voluminous blankets. Paralysed, the doctor could only watch as Sensei nuzzled the boy’s forehead like an extremely large cat. “I’m so sorry, Izuku. I'll do better for you.” With a peck, Midoriya was frozen and his heart monitor flatlined.

The doctor floundered in a crushing sea of whys.

“But-”

“-Take care of him for me until I get back, won’t you doctor?” Without another word, Sensei disappeared. And so the doctor was left standing there with Midoriya whose was face trapped in time, stuck within Suspended Animation until Sensei returned. His face caught in a reflexive flinch from Sensei’s final moment of contact.

Two completely different people, from two different fields, with two different sets of morals who both arrived at parallel conclusions. Two people who both realised that their only ongoing means of survival was to depend on and guide those around them. Two people who, once they ran out of familiar resources, scrambled and clawed at whatever they could reach and reshape until it suited their purpose.

Sensei who wielded the Noumu and manipulated Shigaraki into doing what he was no longer able to do after the injuries All Might had inflicted upon him. Sensei who was a shadow of himself, a wreck forced to act through others lest he further jeopardise his health.

Midoriya who wielded honeyed words and persuaded others to do his bidding while he wrestled with a Quirk that slowly debilitated and encroached upon his health. Midoriya who provided guidance to his classmates in exchange for… in exchange for any services rendered. Who traded his presence for their loyalty.

For a brief moment, the doctor saw the two of them before him and bit by bit the mental image blurred together. The mutual interests, the Quirk applications, the personality, the people surrounding them… Slowly, they warped together, overlapping and morphing.

Midoriya became All For One.

The doctor fled the room, feeling an eyeless stare from months gone by following him as he retreated down the corridors.

The doctor should have remembered that his assumed prospects for Midoriya were not the same as Sensei’s prospective role for Midoriya.

Hitoshi’s eyes snapped open. Not because there was a creak, but because there wasn’t one in an entirely too dark room, with silence too deep and air that was too stale. Absolutely nothing like where he’d

gone to sleep.

This wasn't his room.

Breath quickening, Hitoshi snapped upright and fumbled for his eyes.

SNAP.

And was wrenched downwards again by whatever the hell was wrapped around his arms. Some sort of weighted restraint that was buckling him downwards into a flat surface that felt more gurney than bed.

"What the hell?" Hitoshi muttered as he shifted and this time attempted to inch his way into a seated position instead.

"I wouldn't recommend doing that," a deep voice that sent shivers down Hitoshi's spine commented from an area to Hitoshi's right. But a response was a response and he could work with that as a matter of a standard.

He reached for his Quirk and flailed helpless at thin air as he made contact with precisely nothing.

Hitoshi froze, acutely aware of the giant amount of nothing that currently occupied where his Quirk had once comfortably sat since his inception. No Quirk. Okay, he'd dealt with Eraserhead, he was used to not having his Quirk work in optimal conditions. He could panic, but that wasn't going to help himself. He could try lashing out, but that'd break his arms. Could he gather information? Possibly.

"What did you do to my Quirk?" Hitoshi blindly snapped out. What was the worst that could happen?… Hitoshi's train of thought steered dangerously close to the subject matter of the missing Midoriya and abruptly derailed. Best not to think about it.

"I'm… loaning it… from you, so to speak," the voice replied and Hitoshi felt any remaining blood in his face cheerfully leave him to his fate and Hitoshi's brain slammed straight back into the topic of Midoriya. "Izuku's been rather critical of my Quirk acquisition practices. You're an attempt at my new policy considerations. The things I do to keep honoured guests happy." And the blood abruptly surged back into Hitoshi's face. All For One referenced Midoriya in present tense! At least something more present that Hitoshi would expect from a kid who had a building dropped on them. Midoriya was alive! Maybe. But how the hell was he meant to tell anyone?

In the intervening period while Hitoshi thought, there was the gentle drumming of fingers on a nearby metallic surface. Jovial, nearly friendly, Hitoshi's mind flashed back to Bakugou snarling and frothing at the mouth with rage. Rage over All For One's faux politeness while he oversaw Bakugou's capture. The puzzle pieces slowly began to snap together, piece by piece as Hitoshi's brain somersaulted into the recovery position.

"You're All For One," Hitoshi deadpanned, struck by an insurmountable feeling of *Bakugou was right* that Hitoshi loathed experiencing even when he wasn't held captive by Japan's Most Wanted. Bakugou was going to be insufferable.

"Correct. I've heard whispers about Bakugou's little investigation into my retrieval of Izuku." It shouldn't have come as a surprise, but with Bakugou's high functioning paranoia that All For One had spies everywhere and could and would eventually find out, Hitoshi was almost relieved by the bastard's casual reveal. No pretences about what was going on and that was half the fight already won. All For One wasn't going to play entirely coy. Hitoshi was awake and alive for a reason. He was dreading the reason, but it was an opportunity at the very least.

Ideally, Hitoshi could keep his mouth shut and play dumb, but it's not like there was anyone else there to ask All For One who, how, where, why when it came to why exactly he was strapped to a gurney and why All For One taking a break in the same room. "Why take Midoriya?" Hitoshi hurled out, still gingerly feeling at the restraints. They felt metallic more than anything else. Not a material he could break from his experimental flexing. Unless his Quirk magically rematerialised, escape wasn't an option that was currently on the table. Maybe Bakugou could've snapped them, but Bakugou was built to fire explosions out of his hands. One of the lucky ones.

"Why?" All For One hummed. "Why indeed?" There was a drumming of fingers again, while All For One carefully chose his words. "Izuku's rather… unique… shall we say. He's irreplaceable." Light, nearly fond, Hitoshi wasn't quite sure what to make of All For One, the century plus year old monster, calling anyone "irreplaceable". "There is only one Izuku and there only ever will be one Izuku," All For One mildly added, only to toss Hitoshi into a sea of information, that was absolutely useless without context. Midoriya was, by all accounts, a perfectly plain and normal person. There was no sane reason for All For One to abandon an entire operation to recover one kid. Well… if he was after Midoriya's Quirk…..

Hitoshi had some context after all. “Is it because he got a Quirk from you?” All For One was all about Quirks from what Bakugou said, a creepy commonality that he shared with Midoriya. When in doubt… it always seemed to be about Quirks with this guy. If Midoriya’s Quirk was as strong as everyone thought, it’d make sense that All For One was going above and beyond to regain his asset.

There was a sigh and Hitoshi scrambled for purchase on the gurney as the restraints pulled him taut again. “He thought so as well, but no, no, his Quirk hardly comes into it really. I’m rather appalled that he thinks he’s here due to his Quirk. What a waste of his talents.” Talents… Hitoshi hovered on that word. What were Midoriya’s talents? Quirks were among them… but that was only one. What the hell was All For One talking about?

Hitoshi blinked. “Then why the hell did you steal his dead body?” What was left if the focus on Quirks wasn’t being taken into account? Todoroki’s own brother fell victim to corpse snatching. How long had All For One been doing this for? For what purpose? Why Midoriya over the entire League of Villains? None of this lined up with what everyone knew or even what the police knew, which Bakugou was rather empathetic in pointing out. All For One wasn’t being himself and that was a worry.

All For One tutted. “There is a person attached to his body,” he pointed out with a level of reproach that had Hitoshi metaphorically scratching his head. Reproach from a mass murderer who was currently defending the honour of his murder victim. Right. If Hitoshi left this alive, there was going to be academic papers and case studies written about this encounter. “While Quirks are all well and good, there are certain people who possess characteristics that surpass that of a Quirk. These traits are far rarer than the Quirks themselves.”

“But it’s you,” Hitoshi pointed out. “Isn’t your entire empire built on Quirks?” That was Bakugou’s hypothetical situation, being a guy who knew another guy that had the misfortune of regular run ins with All For One. All For One who traded favours for Quirks like some sort of shady Quirk fixer.

“Not everyone can be swayed by Quirks, Shinsou,” All For One… was reprimanding him again. This was so bizarre. Why wasn’t he dead yet? “While the lesser intentioned people may fall over each other in their rush for a Quirk, Izuku required a forty page contract on standards of behaviour before he’d so much as brush his teeth for me.” Hitoshi could… he could see that actually, from what he’d been told

about Midoriya. But what he couldn't see was All For One agreeing with any of it.

"I don't understand why you're going to this much effort." Hitoshi shook his head. All For One wanted something from Midoriya, but if it wasn't a Quirk or related to Quirks then what was it? All For One didn't strike him as terribly sentimental person… but then again, how much did anyone even know about All For One?

"You don't have to know why or understand the arrangement." An arrangement that Midoriya wouldn't have been in any position to refuse provided what All For One said was accurate in the first place. There's no way Midoriya would've volunteered for anything out of sheer principle. Bakugou was adamant. "You simply have to understand that you will be leaving here with your Quirk and that's all that you're required to do." Hitoshi blinked.

"I thought you didn't give Quirks back," Hitoshi dully observed, feeling their entire library of knowledge warp in the face of All For One's new policy considerations. All For One traded in Quirks. He didn't just give them back to people when he done. What changed? What made him try something else? It couldn't just be Midoriya… could it?

But it was too late to ask the question. Hitoshi could hear a rustle of clothing.

"I wouldn't dream of keeping it, Shinsou," All For One's fading voice whispered in harmony with his footsteps. "Not after Izuku threatened to break my fingers."

And Hitoshi was left there, reeling, with only the mental image of a captive Midoriya threatening to break the fingers of Japan's Most Wanted to keep him company.

What the hell is going on here?

Eri was being held by Chronostasis with Overhaul a step ahead of him. Overhaul never wanted to hold her. Overhaul only ever came near her when she was stuck in the chair… That was normal, but the air… the air wasn't normal.

Something was wrong. She could feel it in the air. Feel it through the floors and walls and every movement Chronostasis made towards

the… room…

Thump thump thump.

A beat, like a passing train on its tracks, from when they rocked side to side.

Thump thump thump.

But trains didn't get louder, right? Because they were on rails and the train couldn't get closer than what they were on rails, right? So where was the train?

Thump. Thump. Thump.

Eri squirmed.

"Huh, what's your problem, Eri?" Chronostasis might have been looking at her. She couldn't tell.

"The noise…" She whispered. Couldn't they hear it?

"What noise?" Overhaul snapped over his shoulder.

THUMP. THUMP. THUMP. THUMP. THUMP.

With each THUMP the tunnels jumped up and down, sending Chronostasis and Overhaul staggering.

THUMPTHUMPTHUMPTHUMPTHUMP.

The tunnels buckled and Eri was hurled from Chronostasis's grasp. Rolling, she came to a stop at a doorway, leaving her flat on her back.

"What the hell-"

Eri didn't catch the rest, a rock fell from above. She watched it approach. Closer and closer.

Then it exploded in a cloud of dust.

And a man in a suit stepped into sight.

"Really. A child is about to be crushed to death and your response is to stand there doing nothing," his deep voice sent chills down Eri's spine.

“Who the hell-” Chronostasis disappeared in a cloud of red and black… things… tentacles…? That shot through the air. Eri flinched.

“I can’t say I’m impressed by your operations, Overhaul. Why is this child wearing rags?” The man loomed overhead and Eri stared at the skull faced man. Who was he? “Do you not clothe prisoners properly? How desperately broke are you to not be able to afford three sets of clothing for a child?”

Overhaul snarled. “I know you-” And he stopped. Like… a puppet who’d had their strings cut. He stood there, staring, then suddenly walked past both of them without a single backwards glance. Eri blinked.

“Well, that was remarkably straightforward. What an easy Quirk to use,” the skull faced man pleasantly commented, reaching out a hand and pulling Eri to her feet. He didn’t let go. “If you don’t mind, I’m going to keep holding on. Izuku wouldn’t forgive me if I dropped another building on someone during his lifetime.”

Eri thought about that for a moment. “Buildings?” Why was he dropping buildings on people?

“It was an accident,” he explained. “I’m still making it up to him.” Oh, that made sense… Eri guessed. She felt a pleasant numbness instead of where she knew she hit the ground hard.

And they began to walk. Not that them walking through the tunnels felt real. It was almost like a dream but… she couldn’t wake up. Step by step, as the skull faced man idly chattered away and Eri still didn’t feel like she was awake.

“You’ve been with them for this long and they haven’t even bought you a dress,” the skull faced man complained. “They should consider themselves extremely fortunate that I’m attending on Izuku’s behalf, because if he’d seen this there wouldn’t be much of them left. A few fragments of bone if they were extremely lucky.” He waved a hand. “One of the first things I had to do was buy Izuku clothing. I can only imagine what he would’ve done if I hadn’t made an effort.”

Hand in hand with the… was he a villain? He dressed like one. Looked like one. Eri was sure that Chronostasis wasn’t going to be getting up again after what the skull faced man did to him. Eri had seen Overhaul turn people into red clouds before, but the skull faced man was much more uncaring about what he’d done. It was done and Chronostasis didn’t exist anymore in the skull faced man’s mind. Not

at all like Overhaul.

“Um… who’s Izuku?” Eri asked as they stepped around another crumbled piece of wall. Overhaul obediently stepped ahead of them. The skull faced man inclined his head and Overhaul, with a blank expression, opened a new doorway in the side of the wall which they turned and stepped into, carrying right on down the new path.

“Why are these tunnels so close to each other? No building inspector ever would have signed off on this lair,” the skull faced man sighed. “But, to answer your question, Izuku is my guest. Currently, he’s sick. You have him to thank for your… rescue. He would have done it himself, but he’s been ill recently and is unable to leave bed.”

Eri nodded and she felt the skull faced man gently squeeze her hand.

“I had no idea that Overhaul was keeping any prisoners,” he continued on and Eri was once again struck by how unreal the real world felt. Overhaul’s house was… it was in pieces. The thumping noises… must have been the skull faced man slamming down walls and doors while he made his way down. People were everywhere in different poses, some normal some not. Still. Unmoving. Some walls were painted red edged with brown. The skull faced man hurried her past them. “My apologies, if I had’ve known I would have been more… discrete with my entry. It wasn’t my intention for this to be so… traumatic.”

“It’s okay,” Eri automatically answered, but the skull faced man immediately shook his head.

“It’s not okay. None of this is normal. Why were you even here?” There was an edge to the skull faced man’s voice that Eri didn’t like. “Why keep you in rags when they’re so well dressed? Did Overhaul seriously think no one would notice if you ever went outside?”

Eri trembled. “I… I don’t know.” Eri really didn’t know what they were doing or what they wanted. What… what did the skull faced man want?”

“Don’t worry, I’m here for Overhaul,” and the man seemed very pleased. “Finding you was a happy accident. Right now I’m doing a small test run of this Quirk to make sure I can use it to help Izuku.”

Eri stared at the skull faced man. “Help… Izuku?”

“Overhaul the Quirk has phenomenal healing capabilities. Overhaul

the person is a degenerate societal reject with the social acumen of mosquito." Most of the words went over Eri's head but she nodded. "With Brainwashing I can compel Overhaul to make proper use of his Quirk instead of whatever harebrained scheme he was involved with here. I can compel him to heal Izuku," the skull faced man nodded. "Really, what a waste of a Quirk on a waste of person." Then he mumbled far more quietly. "Maybe I should do what Izuku suggested and spend the time to learn how this one works…"

"It can heal people? I've only seen it kill people," Eri said uncertainly. "People fall apart and become whole again." Hadn't Overhaul done that to Eri herself? Those memories were a haze. All of them were fuzzy. This entire experience was becoming fuzzy.

"He disassembles them then reassembles them in what we would call the factory reset standard," the skull faced man agreed. "Free of illness or damage since he alters them on a molecular level. It's superior to normal regeneration. It's a shame that a mental deficient has the required expertise… but that's what Quirks are for," he concluded with a lenient shrug. "Modern problems require Izuku's solutions, clearly."

Overhaul's Quirk could save people. It could heal. Eri knew at some level it had to heal for her to be still intact after Overhaul taking blood… but to repurpose it? It made Eri wonder.

Another corridor and sunlight filtered in from above.

"And so we've reached our destination. Our happy candidate has performed admirably in Stage One of his performance review." Overhaul vanished in a rush of black sludge. "You might want to hold your breath for this one."

And Eri felt herself be whisked away in a rush of darkness, the skull faced man still tightly clinging to her hand with huge hands of his own.

All Eri could do was ponder about the mysterious Izuku.

The doctor stumbled, his head spinning. He was there and then he wasn't. Blackness then light and sound and it oscillated as he came in and out of being. Oscillated as he himself phased in and out of being with every touch of Overhaul. But was no reprieve. His thought process never truly ended as he was shoved in and out of limbo with

the touch of a madman at the direction of Sensei.

Sensei and his new puppet lurked above with Sensei perched and watching from his seat. His puppet was substantially closer, awaiting new orders.

“Still intact, doctor?” Sensei called, his hands clasped and expectant.

“Y-yes,” the doctor stuttered. Though the doctor wouldn’t call how he felt now intact by any stretch of the imagination. He felt pulled, stretched and teetering dangerously on the verge of collapse. His coat felt far too large and his proportions were odd… Was there any loss when Overhaul operated? Was it mere restructuring or were there other processes at work? How were his thought processes still intact after… after being repeatedly killed and resurrected to give Sensei his answers.

“Excellent, I think this is enough data to commence treatment reliably.” Sensei outstretched his hands and flexed them habitually. “Brainwashing is holding with even with Overhaul in effect, which means Quirk death is only occurring with the complete cessation with the Quirk or a lack of functionality. How interesting. Clearly the Quirk remains in a limited capacity, but the lack of ongoing signals is what causes the Quirk to cease functioning and the subject to break free.” Sensei didn’t require an answer from the doctor. If Midoriya was still coherent he would’ve received this barrage of speculation. Midoriya’s idea… but Sensei’s execution.

“Treatment…” The doctor gasped, feeling the world around him swim. He wanted to be sick. How many times.. how many…

“Yes, I think it’s about time I finally saw Izuku’s condition for myself, don’t you?” Sensei purred and the doctor fought down the urge to weep. Sensei who’d be made whole again by the Quirk. Sensei who was willing to die to live again and no doubt subject Midoriya to the same process. But Overhaul wasn’t without risks. Would Sensei be the same person afterwards? Overhaul cured beyond physical ailments.

Would Sensei be the same?

Would Midoriya be the same?

Would the doctor be the same once the room stopped spinning?

He couldn’t… he couldn’t think…

“Yes, Sensei,” he mumbled and the doctor hit the floor, hearing a dull clatter as his glasses bounced away. Faintly, he heard a chuckle as his vision faded to black.

Toshinori groaned. Vlad King’s interrogation was coming up soon and Toshinori’s sleep wasn’t in the best shape it’d ever been in. Endeavor wanted to sit in and Toshinori had the sneaking suspicion that Endeavor, like everyone else at the moment, was fishing for All For One and hoped that Vlad King was a dog that had a leash leading back to the bastard himself. Even if they found All For One, their options were limited when the bastard could still blow up cities. But…

He couldn’t think about this, he had to sleep. But Toshinori couldn’t sleep because he all he did was think when he should have been sleeping. Because he couldn’t sleep he heard the knocking. Knocking that shouldn’t be happening this early in the morning.

At three in the morning on a weekend it was entirely too early for someone to be knocking on his door. But they knocked. And knocked. And knocked. A deliberate, evenly paced beat of no particular hurry or speed. For a period of no less than than three minutes. It was at this point Toshinori decided he’d better open his door before a neighbour attempted an entirely justified murder that Toshinori himself was contemplating.

With no small amount of paranoia, he made his way towards the door. A couple of metres away the knock abruptly stopped and there was a muffled CLANG, followed by footsteps and a high pitched shriek that was likewise muffled.

Toshinori’s step became a sprint. With a bound he made it to the door, undid the latch and flung it open.

Toshinori stared. Before him sat what remained of a gurney and two figures who were precariously balanced on top. A white haired, red eyed girl was perched on the stomach of one Hitoshi Shinsou and stared back, her mouth slightly open. Shinsou was bound, blindfolded, gagged and squawking furiously at Toshinori through the wad of cloth.

The little girl squirmed under Toshinori’s dumbstruck gaze, even while he dived towards Shinsou’s restraints. Trap or not, the poor boy was going to suffocate in the event of it not being some nefarious scheme. “Hi… the man in the skull faced mask told me to say Izuku

says hi." Skull faced mask… Dim registration was firing in the back of Toshinori's brain. Alarm bells sounded. Red flags were raised. The time of morning was not helping!

"Man in the skull faced mask?" Toshinori repeated, feeling his heart beat rapidly accelerate. With a hefty pull, the gag and blindfold came away from the student and Shinsou sucked in a huge gasp of air.

"All For One," he wheezed, his eyes focusing on Toshinori and Toshinori's heart thumped even more wildly. "It was All For One."

All For One. All For One was here!? Why the hell was the building still here?

All For One here!

"All For One was here?" Toshinori demanded, reaching for his phone. "All For One took you?" Another child. Children. The bastard stole more children. Toshinori was going splatter him across Japan after he got ahold of him. There wouldn't be any pieces left to save or resurrect next time, nothing but particles on the wind.

"Yes, but it doesn't matter," the boy coughed and spluttered with urgency. "Midoriya is alive!"

Toshinori froze mid-way through furiously scrolling through his contact list. "What did you say…"

Alive. Midoriya alive… Alive…"Midoriya's alive," Shinsou insisted, his eyes wide and bulging, dislodging the quiet girl into Toshinori's arms as he stumbled to his feet. "I saw him! He's alive!" Toshinori struggled to both hold the girl and his phone.

Alive. Alive. Alive. ALIVE.

"And… is he…" Toshinori struggled to find the rest of the words. *Is young Midoriya in one piece?*

"He called All For One a bastard," Shinsou gasped. "He's not happy about being there, but he's alive!"

And Toshinori almost shattered his phone with the speed at which he dialled Tsukauchi.

Young Midoriya is alive!

But how the hell were they going to get him back?

Alive... and trapped with All For One.

Chapter End Notes

As usual, any typos will be fixed when my brain becomes able to read again.

I hope everyone is staying home and washing hands with the pandemic around. Do stay safe.

Adoration

Chapter Summary

Absence makes the heart grow fonder.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

One For All's shade peered at Izuku through strands of long, pale hair and the dark mists that permeated One For All. Izuku stared back, his mind churning. It'd been too long since Izuku had last woken up to the light and sound of the waking world. Far far too long. Was this what death was like? An eternity of being trapped inside of a secretive Quirk that was far too human for its own good. At least this ancient entity wasn't as clingy as the one in the waking world.

"So this is it, huh," the shade whispered and Izuku's hackles rose. It wasn't phrased as a question.

"I don't know," Izuku shrugged back. One For All was keeping its distance now, once it had discovered how averse Izuku was to physical contact. For years Izuku hadn't really expected much from others and his mother's had been bittersweet for over a decade. Apart from All Might, they weren't his happiest of memories. Now his most recent experience was with his murderer who spent so much time wrapped around him that Izuku had to seriously wonder how All For One functioned on a daily basis. All For One who was, seemingly, crippled by Izuku's absence. Unable to move on from what he'd done. Tethered to that point in time by Izuku's death.

And now the Quirk he created, One For All was also crippled by Izuku's absence. Creation like creator, for all of One For All's shadows, mist and tricks it couldn't hide the permanent expression of mourning that was etched into every faraway expression. It knew, like its creator knew, that Izuku wasn't going to walk away from this one. One For All, like All For One, knew the end was in sight. And it stood there and stared blankly at Izuku like it was watching a ghost, a fleeting memory. Izuku wondered that, perhaps if All For One still could form the expression and if Izuku still had enough life in his fading corpse, if the creator and creation would overlay almost perfectly.

One For All's lips trembled while he thought and Izuku was struck

again by a surge of familiarity that made the hairs on the back of neck stand up. There really wasn't anyone else that Izuku could make the comparison to as much as he wracked his brains. Izuku didn't really know enough people beyond his mother, All Might, Kacchan and now… All For One.

And Izuku wondered… if just perhaps… there might be a reason for it…

"I've been doing some thinking," Izuku began and stepped forwards. One For All stepped back. "And something came to mind…" What was there even to do in a realm of nothing, but think? Sure, One For All lived here in this space and could command it to some level… but Izuku couldn't shape it regardless of the method. Thinking, visualising, even asking One For All who lurked nearby… faceless and nearly formless… Izuku never got an answer. So he thought… and thought… and thought some more… until a dawning beacon of light made Izuku regret (ever so slightly) his attempt to remove the doctor's continued capacity to breathe. The realisation that One For All had made a fatal mistake. The realisation that he couldn't test it against the subject of his stray thought.

"Really…" The Quirk answered and Izuku caught a strong whiff of familiar hesitation. Hesitation that Izuku had smelt before only recently in the real world… Ever so recently, when it was wrapped in frantic desperation trying to keep him alive against all the odds. "What do you have in mind?"

Izuku smiled and the Quirk flinched. "You're not actually the First, are you?" Izuku began conversationally and Izuku watched the metaphorical blood drain from the Quirk's face.

One For All, now wearing the face of All For One's brother, flinched as though Izuku had slapped it across the face. "How can you say that?" There was a level of human hurt in the way it threw the words back at Izuku that had Izuku honing in on his target. Quirks… Quirks didn't have feelings like this… they weren't mirror matches of their holders. Tokoyami's definitely wasn't as his darker shadowy half. So why… why was…

"Because you're not," Izuku reaffirmed without tone. "You're a collection of people as you've already shown me."

One For All recoiled. "But I include him! I am him!" It shook its head and Izuku stepped forward yet again.

“If you’re really the First… then why didn’t you offer anyone before me the other Quirks?” Blunt. Blunt, on topic, to the point. Izuku was already dead. What was the worst that could happen? “If the First’s goal really was to take down All For One, then why not offer the Quirks in your arsenal?” Why not give all of the wielders an opportunity to take down a fiend with countless weapons at his disposal? “Why withhold information? Why hide it from All Might who actually managed to kill him?” Izuku took step by tiny step forward and the Quirk retreated an equal amount of distance.

“There wasn’t anyone else who could’ve made use of them. None of them were suitable to have me,” One For All shook his head furiously, his hair flying about his face. “You’re the only one!”

“I don’t believe you,” Izuku stated. “All Might was Quirkless as well and I’m sure he could’ve made use of knowing there were more tools at his disposal.”

Once again, One For All shook his head, gesticulating as he did so. “You aren’t All Might and he’s not you. He never had the mindset to fully utilise my Quirk. None of them did. You’re different to them. You understand how I work,” the Quirk insisted and Izuku did his best to shake off the implications embedded in the wording. “None of them did before you,” it finished, oh so quietly. A tiny heartbroken whisper.

“I don’t think it’s just that,” Izuku soldiered on and grimaced. This was it. The confirmation or denial about the reality of One For All. “Because you and I both know that All For One’s brother wasn’t the first person to hold the Stockpile Quirk… The first person to hold that Quirk after it came away from its original holder? It was All For One himself,” Izuku delivered with the approximation of a sledgehammer into a DIY wall renovation. "In a Quirk that stockpiles both the personalities and Quirks of the previous wielders. Why should he be any different?"

One For All who stiffened. “And what difference does that make?” The Quirk demanded, clenching its fists. Face twisting. Izuku was so close. “I’m still here for you!”

“It makes a huge difference, because you’re not One For All!” Izuku savagely bared his teeth. “One For All doesn’t exist in reality, does it? It never did.”

“I am!” The Quirk cried back. “Please believe me.” Except Izuku didn’t, he couldn’t, not when his own Quirk was hiding things from

him. If he could still call it his own.

“Why did you and All For One give me the exact same advice about Black Whip? Why is it you were going to follow through with a murder attempt?” Izuku slashed a hand through the air. “Why was your only concern me and not the people I would’ve killed if I’d collapsed the building? Why show me All For One's memories and not the memories of the face you're currently wearing?”

One For All’s silence was deafening, but before Izuku’s eyes the posture of the Quirk shifted to an almost nostalgic pose. “Who am I, Izuku?” And the pretence was gone, flung off into the distance. And Izuku was waiting for it.

“You’re All For One!” Izuku punctuated it with a sharp pointing motion. “You have his memories because you *are* him! You’re the original shade within this Quirk, not the brother! That means you’re the one driving, not him!” A dam of emotion spilled and Izuku was awash with relief. The unspoken awkwardness, “One For All” and its expectations for Izuku to be saved by his murderer came together in a glorious celestial alignment of understanding. Of course the shade would know itself best.

“Very good, Izuku,” the shade smiled and exploded. Before Izuku’s eyes, he watched One For All’s mask slip and shatter in a familiar explosion of red and black energy. Before Izuku could step back, a giant hand lunged through the mist, latched onto his wrist and yanked him closer.

Izuku stared and All For One stared back, his pale hair buffeted by a wind of his own making. White. All For One had white hair. But the rest of him… it was still a haze. What was he hiding?

“I didn’t want to upset you,” All For One relented. “I know… I know better than anyone what your life was like and what they did to you. That my other self ruined all of your opportunities with an ongoing stroke of stupidity. I know. I know what happened, I know that they didn’t understand.”

If Izuku wasn’t being blown away by the phantom winds, he’d have been blown away by the force of questions finally being answered. “So you hid yourself as another person… as another Quirk.” To hide from people who were far more actively hostile to All For One. To hide from All Might who hadn’t hesitated to end All For One’s life.

“I wasn’t… I wasn’t so self aware before my other self died. He doesn’t

remember it, but before he was revived he was here, trapped in Yagi's head while the doctor forced him back into the world of the living." All For One wrapped an arm around Izuku's shoulders and Izuku was struck more by the Quirk's rush to explain than he was the gesture itself. "He's… he's still linked to me, so when he used Suspended Animation… I moved from where the link was anchored to where the link has another anchor."

"We're... we're in his head," Izuku whispered, feeling ill with a stomach that didn't exist. "We're only here because… we're in him. We're really dead." The screams and crying out… Izuku shuddered.

"Yes, I'm sorry. I… didn't know how to tell you…" That the only reason that Izuku was alive was because his murderer's shade was every bit as fond of him as the original. And it came full circle. Why did All For One care? Either of them?

"But why? What makes me different? You didn't do this for anyone else." And from the sounds of it, would refuse to do it for anyone who came after Izuku as well.

"Because he chose you… even if he doesn't realise or remember doing it," All For One whispered, his voice dropping. "It was always meant to be you. I was made for you. He just didn't know it back then."

Izuku felt a chill spread through him. "Who chose me?"

"The other me," All For One confirmed, "and I agreed with his conclusions."

A block of ice would've had more mobility than Izuku did at that moment. "No, All Might chose me. He was going to UA for a replacement anyway." But why? Why when All Might had already spent six years living off his meagre time limit? Why now when Izuku was on the cusp of entering high school? Why?

"If All Might was here in the flesh, he'd tell you that Sir Nighteye's posturing about the quality of the UA students is what drew him to Mustafar, but I know better," All For One whispered. His hands were know firmly intertwined in Izuku's hair. Like the real All For One, except the real All For One had never attempted to braid Izuku's hair. Izuku who was frozen in position, unable to move, transfixed while the Quirk plucked away at the locks. "I know that to this day that he wants nothing to do with the man who disregarded his thoughts and feelings. He went there on an unknown instinct. He doesn't know why he was there… or what drew him to a school when he had no interest

in retiring on anything but his own terms." Izuku was inexplicably cold. Frozen, in spite of the hulking ghost that was curled around him. "He was drawn there… drawn to you… because I directed him to you," he murmured into Izuku's ear.

"No…" No. It wasn't, was it? *Nonononononono.* "It can't have been you. He didn't… he didn't see you… You didn't let him see you." All Might never saw the shades, he never saw All For One. How… how could he have influenced the decision? It couldn't be possible.

All For One snuggled in deeper still into Izuku's hair. "He didn't have to see me. A stray whisper here and there, a well chosen memory at the right time… that's all it takes, little Izuku," All For One fairly cooed and Izuku guts sank through his feet. "I chose you, not All Might," All For One confirmed, a now hand resting on Izuku's shoulder. Subdued, the complete opposite of Izuku's first exposure to his theatrics at Kamino. "Not that I had to do much to persuade him, in all fairness to you, Izuku. All I had to do was point him in the right direction and he leapt on the opportunity to give me to someone who had real passion that went beyond the prolonging of an age old feud."

"So… he only saved me because-" because All For One had suggested the idea, no matter how far down and Izuku felt his heart begin to break.

"-No." Izuku was tugged by the Quirk. "You were saved because that's what Toshinori Yagi has always done. I only compelled him to Mustafar. Him handing me over to you was all him." All For One almost sounded proud, if he was even capable of the emotion. "I very much so agree with his choice." The relief was almost crushing. All Might… All Might had been largely left alone by the Quirks machinations then, but what about the real All For One?

"Is this why the other you saved me from the building collapse?" How could All For One have chosen Izuku? How did he even know Izuku? And chosen him for what? He didn't even seem to know the Quirk had moved on until after Izuku was already in his custody. All For One who habitually killed all of the wielders of "One For All". Why was Izuku so different? Why did it always come back to All For One inability to answer questions?

"It's the other way around. You weren't saved because of my presence. I chose you for the same reason my other self went to such great lengths to save you," All For One concluded his point by gently patting Izuku on the head which only served to leave Izuku even more

confused. “So we can stay with you,” All For One insisted and Izuku stared at the Quirk.

“But why?” Why. Why. Why. Why?

All For One smiled and the world rippled. “Because we adore you.”

Izuku’s eyes opened in the real world. There was a moment of blessedly nothing, then his fingers sank into All For One’s suit and Izuku saw red.

Hitoshi was glad it wasn’t the inside of a police station. All For One, sick bastard that he was, had elected to dump him and the kid on the doorstep of the lead investigator of Midoriya’s missing persons case. Maybe that was fine for Hitoshi initially, but now he wasn’t so sure… This Yagi guy… he was a character.

“You didn’t think? Of course you didn’t think! A UA student was reported missing with a known Quirk stealing psychopath at large and NOT ONE OF YOU THOUGHT TO NOTIFY MYSELF OR THE SCHOOL?” Yagi screamed down the phone and Hitoshi was inspired by the amount of murderous intent he conveyed in that instant. If that poor guy being screamed at was opposite Yagi, Hitoshi could visualise him dying on the spot as Yagi’s murderous intent hammered down on him like a cockroach. Complete with a messy splat. “YOU ABSOLUTE IMBECILES.”

Eri, the girl opposite Hitoshi, watched Yagi like he was a fascinating children’s show that had been left on to play at max volume. And Hitoshi didn’t really blame her. It wasn’t often you saw such a senior police officer dress down subordinates while members of the public were in earshot. They defended their own as Ida had been quick to point out. Yagi clearly had no such loyalty. Words weren’t being minced so much as they were atomised from the furious heat radiating off Yagi’s frame. Was that part of his Quirk? It really did make Hitoshi wonder…

“AND WHERE IS THE AMBULANCE I REQUESTED?” Yagi roared down the phone. “THEY’VE BEEN NOTIFIED, HAVE THEY? WHAT ABOUT THE WORD URGENT DID YOU FAIL TO UNDERSTAND? THERE IS A CHILD HERE WHO DOESN’T LOOK LIKE SHE’S EATEN IN SIX YEARS AND YOU’RE TELLING ME ABOUT A NOTIFICATION?” There was a rush of sound from the phone and a noise that might’ve been a sob. “YOU’LL UPGRADE THE PRIORITY, WILL YOU? YOU DO

THAT. I WANT A FULL REPORT OF HOW EXACTLY YOU IDIOTS MANAGED TO SCREW UP THE ONE AND ONLY JOB YOU WERE GIVEN AS A PRIORITY BY THE TIME I GET TO THE STATION." Yagi ended the call with such force that Hitoshi half expected to see the phone explode in a shower of glass. "I'm so sorry you had to hear that, do you need anymore food or another drink?" And in an instant, Yagi was a friendly and concerned consummate host.

Hitoshi and Eri silently shook their heads, their mouths agape in wonder. "No, I think we're okay."

Yagi shuddered. "You say that, but forgive me for not having full confidence in that assertion. I've seen All For One's handiwork up close and no one comes away from dealing with him okay."

Hitoshi frowned. "I don't know… Midoriya seemed okay when I saw him…" Well, "okay" was relative, but he hadn't seen any physical harm beyond the loss of muscle mass but Midoriya didn't seem too surprised by that occurrence. The psychological harm though had shot off the scale and taken out eyes of the nearest passing psychologist.

And Yagi was immediately at attention. "Tell me everything."

Hitoshi shrugged and recounted waking up to All For One's unhelpful words.

"Unusual," Yagi growled. "That's extremely nice by his standards. What's he playing at?"

Hitoshi shuddered. "It gets worse."

He opened his mouth and spoke…

Of All For One's offsider, a fat, obese weasel of a man, who lowered the blindfold to prove that Midoriya was alive and well. Hitoshi opening bleary eyes to see All For One, maskless, his pale hair gleaming in the dim light, with his arms draped around Midoriya. Midoriya who woke up with a start and clawed his way into All For One's clothes, before realising where he was and visibly jumping. A silent understanding passed between Hitoshi and the minion as they watched in silence at what happened next. Hitoshi, bound and gagged, the minion with his mouth hanging open in what had to be the same silent horror that Hitoshi was forced to experience in involuntary silence. Hitoshi who couldn't stop it from happening.

Midoriya reaching up, almost instinctively to poke and prod at All For

One's obscured face and rapidly retracting his hand as though he'd been burned.

"What… what did you do to us?" Midoriya demanded. *Us. Do to us.* Hitoshi shuddered. Midoriya holding out his arm and Hitoshi's eyes widening at the distinct lack of his schoolmate's customary scars. Midoriya who too was staring at scars that no longer existed. Scars that should've been impossible to heal and remove, "What. Did. You. Do." Midoriya hissed without fear, without concern, without much of anything beyond fury. "Whose Quirk did you steal?" Midoriya snapped and Hitoshi's eyes widened at Midoriya's jump in logic. He was already familiar with All For One's practices. Of course he was, what had he seen? What… what was done to him specifically?

"Now now, Izuku, it was a joint effort," All For One warmly spoke into Midoriya's neck and Midoriya twitched. Midoriya who was sandwiched into the man like a favourite plushie while both Hitoshi and the minion watched on in morbid fascination. "I wouldn't have thought of combining Shinou's Brainwashing and Chissaki's Overhaul without your suggestion, but here you are alive and well!" All For One's voice audibly pitched upwards in a way that had Hitoshi wondering if the guy really was an ancient monster. Then the words had repeated themselves in Hitoshi's head. *I wouldn't have thought of combining Shinou's Brainwashing and Chissaki's Overhaul without your suggestion.* There wasn't a parallel universe that Hitoshi could think of where Midoriya would ever willingly give the bastard advice. What the hell had he been doing to Midoriya… beyond whatever the hell was going on here? Why was he holding onto Midoriya like that?

There was a momentary pause as the words slammed into Midoriya. "You bastard!" Midoriya's muffled yell funnelled through All For One. All For One who chortled and stroked Midoriya's hair. "If you don't give it back to him and let him go, so help me-"

"-No need for threats, Izuku. He already has it back." Not that there was any way for Hitoshi to confirm it at the time. "If you look over my shoulder you'll see him-"

-Midoriya scaled All For One like a feral cat and glared over the man's shoulder at Hitoshi. "Shinsou, are you okay?" Midoriya who was so thin… so very very thin… Hitoshi could see what used to be muscle, but it was as though Midoriya had wasted away. Though he had a building dropped on him, so Hitoshi really wasn't sure what he was meant to expect. At least he was alive? But… All For One was alive as well. And healthy as far as Shinsou could see. Shit. That wasn't good

for Operation Rescue Midoriya.

With his mouth gagged, Hitoshi could only half nod or maybe shrug in response to Midoriya's outrage before he made an attempt to gesture in Midoriya's own direction. In true Midoriya fashion, he got it.

"Don't worry about me!" The prisoner insisted. But Hitoshi was going to worry. Worry at the fact that All For One's was still contently attempting to run a hand through Midoriya's hair even while the teen slapped it away. "Get off me," Midoriya barked at the supervillain. Midoriya who didn't want All For One anywhere near him from the sound of it. Midoriya who… skipped crying and flew straight into a rage. Rage. Midoriya. Midoriya enraged.

What the hell happened? What happened to you? What do I tell Bakugou?

"You're on me, technically," All For One pleasantly hummed, completely undeterred by Midoriya's repeated wrenching at his arms.

"Because you won't let go!" Midoriya snapped back, swiping at All For One's hand, only to again be deflected.

"Every time I let go, you injure yourself," All For One shook his head. Midoriya… injuring himself… Hitoshi could see that happening, but he couldn't for the life of him work out why All For One would care about it. All For One seemed more like the type to encourage self injury.

"You dropped a building on me first!" Midoriya hissed back. "Are you going to drop a building on him as well?" Hitoshi's eyes rapidly darted between Midoriya and All For One.

All For One drooped and his voice with it. "No no no, I've learnt my lesson. I wanted to show you that I'm willing to compromise. Shinsou is here as a sign of goodwill. I'll uphold my end of the agreement." Firm certainty that had both Hitoshi and Midoriya squinting at him.

Compromise… Agreement… Was… was he trying to bargain with Midoriya?

"I didn't agree to any agreements! I don't agree to being here in the first place," Midoriya insisted, but Hitoshi could see Midoriya was slowing down in his struggles. Whatever All For One had done clearly took a toll on Midoriya's fitness levels. Midoriya slumped, gasping for breath. "I didn't… agree… to anything…"

“I know you’re upset, and you have every right to be, but please give me some more time.” Pleading. All For One was… pleading… with Midoriya. Why? About what? What did Midoriya have that All For One wanted?

Midoriya’s reply was too quiet for Hitoshi to hear, but All For One raised a hand and the offsider shuffled into action. The final image stuck with Hitoshi, before the blindfold was slapped back on and he was wheeled away. All For One’s encompassing embrace of the limp Midoriya.

“No Izuku, it’s to help *you*, not me. I have more to show you as well, after you’ve eaten.” All For One’s voice grew fainter and fainter as Hitoshi was taken away to god knows where.

“*What the fuck*,” Hitoshi attempted to mumble through the gag at the offsider.

He received a long suffering sigh for his troubles before a weight was dumped on top of him.

“Sensei will be with you momentarily… as soon as Midoriya’s done chewing him out,” the fat man sighed even more deeply and disappeared without another word.

Midoriya… chewing out All For One…

The weight moved and Hitoshi twitched. “I don’t like him very much,” a small voice whispered and Hitoshi jumped.

“Izuku doesn’t like him much either,” All For One noted and Hitoshi leapt upwards again only to be slammed by down by the restraints. “Not to worry, Shinsou. You’ll be delivered back to society, safe and sound.”

The incident ended the same way it began, with darkness and Hitoshi left wondering what the hell was going on. There was a gap between the warp and Shinsou’s awareness of the bonds being untied by Yagi.

When Hitoshi had finished his recollection, Yagi was ramrod straight in the exact position he had since they started, his face twisted in a mirror of Hitoshi’s own mortification. After two or three minutes and a large jug of water, he spoke. “All For One… was… hugging Midoriya.” Yagi spoke as if his soul had detached itself from his body and had taken a vacation elsewhere in the world.

Hitoshi nodded, feeling flatter than he ever had at any other point of his life. “He wants something from Midoriya, but…” Hitoshi struggled with the words.

“Since when has All For One actually cared about any of the children he’s abducted,” Yagi concluded, his head in his hands. “But that level of supposed affection…”

Shaking his head, it didn’t feel right. “No… it was…” And Hitoshi found what he sought in an unlikely location. “It’s like he was trying to comfort him, but…”

“But it’s All For One,” Yagi concluded in a self explanatory manner. “And All For One has never killed anyone with kindness as far as I’m aware. Usually he horrifically murders people then brags about it to their loved ones,” Yagi growled. “What does that prick want from Midoriya? Midoriya doesn't have anything to give him.”

Hitoshi couldn’t even begin to understand All For One’s motivations. Not when he was speaking an entirely different language when it came to Midoriya. Together, both UA student and senior officer shrugged in frustration, while Eri snuggled into a cushion on the lounge, completely unaware of the fate she’d narrowly dodged.

“I have to consult with my team about this behaviour,” Yagi struggled out after a long pause. “I was expecting it to be bad… but this…” Wasn’t even contemplated by police modelling of All For One’s behaviour. “This isn’t even within the boundaries of what we actually thought would happen. Tsukauchi had some… interesting ideas, but none of us thought….” Yagi winced and cut himself off. “We’ll take care of it.”

Before Hitoshi could respond a siren shrieked through the air.

“Oh, Shinsou, one last thing before the ambulance arrives for Eri,” Yagi lightly called out as he made for the front door. “Don’t repeat anything about All For One’s… fondness for Midoriya at the station. Knowing my idiotic colleagues, they’ll think the poor boy voluntarily had a building dropped on him. They’re not the most intelligent people on the planet, since all of those ended up in Agency Management instead.”

Shinsou’s jaw dropped.

Bakugou was going to have a self righteous aneurysm, then explode and kill everyone in the room.

Chapter End Notes

As usual, typos will be corrected at some point. Enjoy.

Anticipate

Chapter Summary

The precursor to it all.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Something was up in the police department. Tomura might've been strapped down and locked in a cell, but the guards… were trembling, like a blast of air whipped clean through the walls. Shaking, nervously glancing over their shoulders… like… like they were expecting an impending disaster to happen. Fuck, at this point even Tomura was expecting bad shit to happen and not Sensei kicking in the front door bad either. Sensei kicking in the front door would be great compared to what these scrubs were expecting. The guards were downright casual about an appearance from Sensei… so what the hell was this? If they were dogs instead of pigs their tails would be between their legs and they'd be whimpering at the approaching storm.

It was like watching raid NPCs slowly develop an awareness of just how screwed they were when a twenty man completed attunement and came to collect the raid's loot, one boss at a time. One head at a time. And these guys… these guys were the trash that padded the raid, so that CDs could recharge and mechanics could be hinted at before the raiders blew up the next boss. These guys were the raid trash and they knew it.

So if they were the trash and these other scrubs the bosses, then who the fuck was the raid leader?

If Tomura had any thoughts of being able to escape whatever the fuck was about to happen, they were gone now. He was being moved to the regular room. Familiar bump after familiar bump, but this time he wasn't being pushed so much as being dragged into position by a team running at full tilt. The trash popped all their movement speed buffs and were going for it. The trash who were about to shit themselves with terror and still pretended it was business as usual for them. All they could do was be good NPCs and follow their programming. They weren't real. None of these people were real. If they were smart they would've run the fuck away. If they were smart they wouldn't have been police in the first place.

Tomura had hardly been positioned and his blindfold removed, when the cat headed officer practically sprinted from the room. Tomura inhaled.

Then the metal slab of a door flew open so hard it bounced off the concrete wall behind it with a CRASH. Tomura winced and the wave of malevolence that haunted the pigs crashed over him, smothering, twisting itself around his lungs. Choking, trapping his air in his lungs. A malevolence so all encompassing that even Sensei himself would reconsider pissing it off.

When Yagi stalked in, Tomura half expected to see storm clouds bucketing down hail sweep in as the rear guard.

There was no tray of coffee. No biscuits. No newspapers.

There was only Yagi. Yagi with his rictus grin.

“Shigaraki!” Yagi’s jovial voice cried out, his skull-like smile too gruesome even for Tomura to set eyes on. That wasn’t right. Yagi… Yagi never smiled like that… Yagi… didn’t really smile and in that instant Tomura felt a long forgotten instinct claw itself back into being. That familiar twist of danger that hadn’t been around since Sensei had disappeared at Kamino or maybe even further back in time. Tomura clamped down on his tongue.

This was different. A single word… a single misstep… and Yagi wouldn’t give two shits about prisoner safety. One wrong move and Tomura would be an asphyxiating wreck on the ground.

Tomura said nothing.

“What’s wrong, Shigaraki? No quaint comebacks? No hello?” Yagi hadn’t bothered to sit and only then did Tomura realise just how tall Yagi was… even taller than Sensei. Yagi spread his arms wide in a familiar motion. “And to think I came with good news as well!” And Tomura was immediately reminded of Sensei, only there was nothing reassuring in Yagi. No friendly gestures, no kind words… Yagi was… Yagi was a monster.

The words didn’t match the person. His hands might’ve been spread in a friendly gesture, but Tomura could only feel those long, boney fingers inching closer and closer around his throat. His tongue flailed. His last, furious gasps of air.

“News?” Tomura gurgled, his heart beating furiously. Gurgled through

the two invisible hands that were ever so slightly compressing his ribcage. Hands all over him. Hands that were ripping, tearing, pulling at him. Hands that weren't like his hands. Hands that wanted to rip him limb from limb. Nine distinct pairs that were clamped around him in a death grip.

"There's good news and there's bad news," Yagi was almost singsong in his approach. Mocking Tomura. Mocking his suffering. "The good news for you that All For One is alive and well!" Yagi pumped a fist that had Tomura shuddering. All For One now… not Sensei… "Isn't that good news, Shigaraki?" Yagi leered. His sunken eyes almost glowed with a light Tomura saw on the some of high level demons who beat his undergeared shit in during raids, back in the day… How far away those days felt now.

But he couldn't… he couldn't be distracted, when he needed so much effort just to force the air down. How the hell did they know Sensei was alive and well? What the hell had happened? If Sensei was well… then where the hell was he? Sensei could roll clean over the trash here dishing out one shots and AOEs for days, so where was he? Why wasn't he here helping Tomura? What the hell was going on? Where the hell was All Might? They'd asked enough questions about All Might for the bastard to make an appearance but he never did.

"How…?" Another gurgle of breath gone. He was running out of air, but Yagi was undeterred. Yagi didn't fucking care. Yagi was incapable of caring. Yagi. Yagi. Yagi.

"Ah," Yagi exhaled and waved a magnanimous hand. "And regretfully, we come to the bad news."

Tomura twitched.

"See, we've discovered why All For One never took our All Might certified bait," Yagi emphasised the last word with an almost serpentine hiss and click of his tongue. The shadows growing, darkening his already void ridden face. Only now did Yagi fall into a seat, mere inches away from Tomura's constricted throat. Tomura who couldn't defend himself… Tomura who was bait for Sensei. Tomura who they wanted Sensei to rescue. Why? So All Might could finish the job? "Go on Shigaraki, have a guess."

He could only open his mouth in a silent scream.

"Not much of an answer, but I'll accept it." Stop. Stop. Stop. Yagi had to… had to stop. Had to be stopped. Where… where was… everyone?

Why were they…?

“You see, Shigaraki, it turns out that All For One never came to rescue you because he’s upgraded to the newer, superior model.”

Any attempt at breathing died. “What…”

“We were wondering for ages why he stole Izuku Midoriya’s corpse.” Yagi waved a hand and Tomura tracked it.

No.

“Couldn’t for the life of us work out why he’d want some random kid’s corpse and why he’d ditch you to go and get it.”

No. No. No.

“But lo and behold, we have a lead! Some kid saw All For One with Midoriya, and while Midoriya wasn’t thrilled about being used as All For One’s personal therapy human, All For One was absolutely over the moon to be chewed out.” If it was possible, Yagi’s feral expression only broadened even further. “Didn’t think I’d hear of the day when All For One voluntarily hugged or complimented anyone for giving a performance review, but apparently poor Midoriya was unlucky enough to land himself in that very special boat.”

Nonononononononono. It wasn’t possible. It wasn’t true. Sensei had been nice to Tomura as well. It wasn’t. It wasn’t! Midoriya wasn’t special… but then why had Sensei warned him away from Midoriya without ever seeing his Quirk? It couldn’t be true. It wasn’t true. No. Yagi was lying. He had to be lying. It wasn’t possible.

It wasn’t. It wasn’t. No no no.

IT WASN’T TRUE.

Sensei wouldn’t leave him. He wouldn’t. He wouldn’t!

Indifferent, beaming, Yagi leaned forwards and slapped Tomura on the back. Slapped the last bit of air from Tomura’s lungs and they collapsed in a surge of agony. “So really, Shigaraki, what I’m trying to say is that we don’t need you anymore. You’re being transferred back to Tartarus tomorrow where you’ll rot for the rest of your miserable life until they sort out your execution. You’re useless to us and to All For One and I never thought I’d see the day where I agreed with the bastard. Thought I’d drop in and give you the good news.”

Yagi stood, winked, flicked his index fingers and thumbs at Tomura, clicked his tongue twice and disappeared out the room with a bounce in his step, slamming the metal door behind him.

It was only then did Tomura truly understand. Tomura wasn't a bystander watching a raid team go by to flatten the current boss for a mount. No. He was the final boss of the first expansion and Yagi was the max level PC from the latest expansion soloing for vendor loot.

Tomura never stood a chance.

Tenya honestly couldn't blame Bakugou when his fourth teacup exploded in his hands. Gran Torino didn't seem to blame him either (though Tenya was sure the cheap set they'd purchased specifically for Bakugou was helping). Everyone was too busy attempting to rehinge their jaws after Shinsou's fidgeting and explosive revelations. Gran Torino in particular had his head in his hands, for all the world appearing as though Shinsou had commenced the evening by storming over and furiously punching the old man in the stomach.

"What the fuck do you mean All For One was nuzzling him!?" Bakugou was snarling an inch away from Shinsou's face. Shinsou who was somehow alive and still in possession of a Quirk. Shinsou was witnessed a very alive Midoriya being detained by… a rather… attached… All For One. Tenya wanted to be ill. "Deku would never tolerate that shit. Fucking never. Deku can't fucking stand people touching him. He can't handle his own mother touching him." Tenya opened his mouth to dispute the assertion, but… he'd never really seen Midoriya with his mother before and Bakugou knew both of them far better than Tenya. Tenya who'd already been told off by Todoroki for placing parents on pedestals. Tenya elected to keep his mouth shut.

Even Shinsou didn't seem to want to think about All For One's actions in too much detail. "I don't think Midoriya was in a position to say no, Bakugou. Especially not with me there. There wasn't much of him left compared to before Kamino. Just skin and bone and when he woke up it's like he wasn't happy to be awake in the first place." Understandably so. Waking up with a mass murderer wrapped around you sounded like a fate worse than death, especially after the peace of actually dying, only to be yanked back into a waking nightmare. Midoriya had been catapulted from one catastrophe into another unprecedented one without so much as a whisper of warning. Straight

from death into All For One's waiting arms.

"Of course he wasn't fucking happy! How the fuck would you feel if you woke up with some creepy old, mass murdering prick using you as a pillow?" Bakugou howled. "What the fuck? What the fuck would possess him to fucking hug Deku of all people? Like he fucking knows him or some shit." Tenya had the impression that there was a far larger underlying reason of why All For One would choose to steal a corpse, steal another person to resurrect that corpse, then release said stolen person back into the wild after reanimating the corpse. All For One's desperate and possessive behaviours were at this point far more concerning than any attempt to turn Midoriya into a Noumu. All For One wanted a living and coherent Midoriya, not a corpse and by all accounts? That was substantially worse than what any of them had been imagining. A Noumu was a weapon. Midoriya was… Midoriya, from Shinsou's description may as well have been a cute animal All For One found in alleyway that he decided to raise from the dead and keep.

Uraraka was greener than Tenya had ever seen her. "Hugging… as in actually hugging him?"

Shinsou's expression was nearly vacant. "Hugging as in Midoriya may as well been his long lost son who recently recovered from a near death experience." Shinsou's deadpan delivery caused a collective wince to practically resonate around the room. "I'm not joking, Bakugou. All For One definitely knew Midoriya before Midoriya knew about All For One. He was pleading with Midoriya about self inflicted injuries. I don't know what was happening, but Midoriya didn't deny it either."

"Self inflicted?" Monoma called from the back. "You mean like the Sports Festival self inflicted injuries? Could Midoriya have injured himself trying to escape?" Not a bad thought. Midoriya had maimed himself for lesser reasons, which is why Gran Torino had been the only pro hero willing to take him on. No one these days wanted such a fragile intern. No one wanted to attend a funeral for so someone so young, not that it mattered at this point.

"Monoma raises a valid point. Midoriya has injured himself before in attaining outcomes," Tenya added. "Could All For One have been commenting on an escape attempt?"

Shinsou shrugged. "I don't know, Ida. Sounded like my old man telling me off for raiding the fridge after midnight. Whatever it's about, it's

an old enough problem for Midoriya to have automatic response." And had enough regard from All For One for the supervillain to not immediately attempt to kill him after being called out. "All For One wants something from Midoriya and Midoriya doesn't want to hand it over." Like what? Nothing Shinsou said lined up with All For One wanting a Quirk.

"So All For One was obsessing?" Tenya attempted to clarify. What wording were they meant to use when a supervillain had abducted a child and was… well… seemingly making an attempt to... by Shinsou's description, parent their murder victim. The manual for these situations really didn't help.

"Fussing," Shinsou corrected. "All For One was fussing. I wasn't kidding when I said the guy was treating Midoriya like his long lost kid."

Asui inclined her head. "Could All For One one be related to Midoriya?"

And Bakugou's derisive snort cut through the air like a whip. "Do you extras really think someone like All For One would marry a wimp like Deku's mother or even marry into that entire shit family? That bastard was going to have me turned into a Noumu for taking a dump on the League of Shitstains and you really think he'd tolerate Inko Midoriya?" Bakugou oozed confidence. "I really fucking doubt it. Deku's dad is a fucking deadbeat, not a supervillain."

"I really didn't need that mental image, Bakugou," Mineta's small voice warbled as he gagged into a bin.

"You're welcome, dipshit." Bakugou cracked his knuckles. "Shinsou, what about the arsehole offsider who mentioned Deku shit talking All For One?" Ah yes, All For One's accomplice. With All For One's arrogance, Tenya wouldn't have been at all surprised if All For One felt that he no longer needed to hide.

"The doctor that was there was scared of Midoriya," Shinsou nodded. "The way he looked at them… I wouldn't be surprised if Midoriya already tried something and got caught." *Deep breaths, Tenya. In. Out. In. Out. Slow and steady. Don't think about it too hard.* "He made a comment about Midoriya chewing out All For One as well, as if it'd happened before."

"Doctor!?" Todoroki and Bakugou snapped at the same time then exchanged mutual expressions. It was like watching two people who

realised, through some unseen communication, that both had failed the exact same exam question in the exact same manner and received the exact same score.

“What fucking doctor?” Bakugou demanded. Todoroki was also leaning forwards in his seat, sparking dangerously close to Bakugou.

Shinsou gave the description of this mysterious doctor and it didn’t mean much of anything to Tenya. But Bakugou, Bakugou was another story. Bakugou was turning red. His eyes narrowing, his hands erupted into furious, rolling explosions that made the entire table rattle and rock. Twisting. Coiling, preparing to spring. An impending nuclear blast waiting to happen.

Tenya tensed. “Move!” And the entirely of 1-A and associates dived sideways as Bakugou’s palm slammed into the table and it detonated in a shower of fiery splinters that Todoroki pinned in the air with a quick blast of ice. Mineta’s shriek pierced through the evening. Tenya could only hope the neighbours at this point where used to the noise enough for them not to call the police. Bakugou was already on thin ice for punching out Sir Nighteye, even if it was admirable that he was going to the aid of Detective Yagi and Midoriya’s reputation. Disastrous for his professional career, but admirable nonetheless.

“I’LL FUCKING KILL HIM! THAT FUCKING BASTARD!” Bakugou was already running, lunging for the exit, only for Uraraka, Asui and Gran Torino to grab ahold of his weightless body and drag him back to earth.

“Bakugou, what’s up? Kill who?” Kirishima ducked an explosive swipe. “Calm down, man! That’s not cool!”

“Doctor Tsubasa,” Bakugou snarled, sparks spraying much of the room in his frantic struggle to break free. “Fucking Tsubasa! We went to school with his grandson! He diagnosed Midoriya as Quirkless! He was the one I asked about All For One’s fucking Quirks! Of course he fucking knew what was going on! The bastard works for him!” Bakugou’s struggles abruptly ceased as Uraraka’s sign had him dropping to the floor in a heap.

“The fuck, Round Face,” Bakugou grunted.

Gran Torino’s short stature loomed over Bakugou. “Did you say Doctor Tsubasa, Bakugou?” And, in that thin, toothy smirk, Tenya saw an echo of Detective Yagi’s own sharklike grimace.

“Yeah, the fuck are you gonna do about it?” Bakugou snapped back as Todoroki helped him to his feet.

“I believe our good mutual friend Detective Yagi would be very interested in knowing all about Doctor Tsubasa,” and absolutely nothing about that inferred that Doctor Tsubasa was going to have an enjoyable time under Yagi’s tender mercies. Tenya wished Detective Yagi the best in his endeavours.

“Fine, but when they find him I want to beat his shit in as well,” Bakugou snapped.

“Whatever kid, you can take that up with him,” Gran Torino assured him and Tenya saw an opportunity forming even while Bakugou fumed.

Tenya cleared his throat and the entire class collectively paused. They knew what was coming. Tenya had warned them separately because Bakugou didn’t want to hear a word of what was going to be proposed.

“We have been avoiding the most difficult part of the conversation, though,” Ida began stiffly, about to voice what everyone had contemplated and what none of them wanted to say to Bakugou. “I think with what Shinsou has told us that we might need to contemplate the possibility that Midoriya wasn’t taken for any grand purpose. We’re dealing with a centuries old mentally unstable mass murderer whose kill count ranges in at least the tens to hundreds of thousands. He doesn’t operate according to standard logic.” Tenya clasped his hands to hide the tremor. “There… is the possibility Midoriya was taken for no other reason than All For One’s own instability. We have to remember that prior to Midoriya, that Tomura Shigaraki was also given preferential treatment.” And ended up with a slavish loyalty that made everyone in the room sick at a fundamental level.

“What the fuck are you talking about, Ida?” Bakugou whispered from the floor.

“I’m referring to the fact that Midoriya’s performance with or without a Quirk has been exceptional, especially since he so recently came into it. I think, given Shigaraki’s abandonment and the… treatment directed towards Midoriya along with the prior association, that perhaps All For One decided to… cultivate a new investment after cutting away the chaff.”

Silence.

And Bakugou was gone, slamming the door behind him.

This was precisely why no one wanted to have this conversation, because why else would All For One be so keen to keep Midoriya coherent while doing his best to score brownie points? Perhaps, what All For One really wanted was simply Midoriya himself. And if Midoriya's inherent value was enough for All For One to disengage and scrap decades of effort, then the odds of recovering Midoriya alive were far slimmer than if he were dead.

A memorial. They held a memorial for him. Izuku had never been more numb and disbelieving in his entire life, even when he woke up with All For One wrapped around him. The special thanks for the committee was dutifully read through and there Katsuki Bakugou was as the Chairman of the Izuku Midoriya Memorial Committee. The Katsuki Bakugou, not a clone or imposter, the real deal. Izuku didn't know what he was meant to feel.

It didn't feel right to call him "Kacchan" anymore. Izuku thought of the word and was bombarded by wave after wave of unpleasant memories… of the explosions, of being dropped from heights by Tsubasa, of the mockery, of being different, of all of the adults joining in, with his mother among them in her silence and tears. Of his own mother who never had a single word of support, of her silence and absence in the truly important parts of his life. And at the head of it all was Bakugou calling him useless, with his screaming banshee of a mother and his rich family and his status and him wanting more in spite of having far more than Izuku could even dream of back then and all everyone did was watch in silence. No one came to Izuku's rescue. No one.

No, Izuku didn't think that the term "Kacchan" was particularly applicable anymore. It was nice that he was making the effort and trying to send a message out, but it didn't erase what Bakugou had done. It didn't change that Izuku had to die before Bakugou would even contemplate defending him let alone offering an apology or any sort of understanding.

"He went to a great deal of effort to have that memorial sorted out," All For One idly commented from his usual perch. "I was surprised, but they do say death changes people."

All For One may as well have spouted a second head. “Are you defending Bakugou?”

“No!” Izuku may as well have slapped him for the injured face All For One made back at him. “More registering my shock at him being capable of remorse. I thought it was beyond him. He does appear to have changed, but it doesn’t change what he’s done.” Changed enough for Bakugou to be sending publicly televised messages to a dead person he didn’t even like. Izuku fully expected the world to keep on moving after he’d died, but this… this didn’t feel like the world had moved on at all. Everyone was still trapped by Izuku’s death. Izuku hadn’t seen his mother at the memorial either, even for the obnoxious wide angle lens they had on the camera.

“You’d know all about that, wouldn’t you?” Izuku grumbled, carefully picking through his chicken soup for carrots.

The mass murderer sighed. “To the contrary, Izuku, I find myself with the same conundrum. All of my memories associated with All Might are negative, but logically I’m thankful for his ongoing efforts in keeping you alive.”

Izuku paused with his spoon full of soup midair. Then dumped it back into his bowl so he could eye All For One.

“Are you feeling okay?” Something had to be wrong with All For One. He was never empathetic to anything All Might had done. Never.

“Never better,” All For One idly stretched. “I suspect this is Overhaul’s doing. His Quirk by nature reconstructs matter at a molecular level and brains are but collections of molecules. So while you and I are both ourselves with our memories… I suspect that our respective decades worth of trauma might’ve been allocated elsewhere. Non-essential you see.” All For One waved his hand like decades of programmed emotional responses being deleted from existence was a perfectly normal occurrence for him.

Izuku slowly blinked at All For One’s casual admission. Erased trauma. Is that why Izuku’s eyes felt so dry watching the memorial? There was the crushing weight of watching person by person take to the stage to offer their memories, but instead of tears dripping down his face all he could was warmth radiating through him. “Is that why I attacked you when I woke up?” And why everything felt muted, like all of Izuku’s inherent reactions had been covered with a veil.

“Most likely. All those long miserable years coming to the surface with

none of the inhibitions, but also none of the prompts." All For One shrugged. "From past experiences, I despise All Might, but without the emotional impetus I find myself thankful. If I had killed him, all those years ago, would you still be here? Would you have made it to Kamino? Or would you have given up long before?" All For One's grimace was a sight to behold and Izuku shifted uncomfortably. "If he's why you're here then I owe him a hamper," and old man's sound of disgust had Izuku come dangerously close to inhaling a carrot.

"I don't know how I'm still here now in all honesty," Izuku glumly reflected. "You've ruined my chances of staying at UA, even if I do escape." And ruined his chances of working in the industry without suspicion haunting his every step. It was hopeless. Izuku shoved his bowl away.

"Don't be like that! We're so close." Close to what? All For One never wanted specify what exactly he was after or why he was using the collective noun. "Your diet is set, but we need more time to put meat back on you. Schooling has been covered in advance, lest you suffer the indignity of ending up unable to perform simple algebra like Tomura and I… have an idea for your fitness."

Without another word, All For One swept Izuku over one shoulder and they were disappearing down an unfamiliar corridor in broad strides.

Something still wasn't right. Izuku didn't feel right… It was like a piece of him was missing. His limbs felt weak. So weak. All For One's grip wasn't breaking no matter how hard Izuku struggled. His muscles were closer to limp spaghetti than functioning parts of his anatomy. But maybe with One For All…

"Don't even think about it," All For One cut in, terse, filled with tension, even with Izuku slung over a shoulder like a sack of rebellious potatoes. "It's not worth it." Which only made Izuku think of All For One, lurking within One For All… Maybe it really wasn't worth it. There was no escape either asleep, awake or dead. All For One's presence was an inevitable constant in all of the avenues Izuku open to him before… before whatever All For One did with Shinsou's Quirk. Even if Izuku did take out All For One, what next? There was already a version of him within the Quirk. What happened if he died again? What happened to Izuku then?

"Worth it to who?" Izuku instead jabbed, feeling…. feeling what? What *was* he feeling? Izuku frowned.

“To either of us,” All For One asserted and Izuku’s perspective wildly shifted as All For One’s grip adjusted and Izuku was pressed against the fiend’s chest instead. “If you die you limit the amount of people you can help. You limit the experiences you gain and you limit the amount of Quirks you can drool over.” Izuku did a double take. That last one sounded more to All For One’s tastes. “And if you die… then I don’t have you anymore,” was whispered in an undertone.

“If you say so.” Izuku really doubted it was that simple.

“All you need to do is let me help you.” Insistent, but not like how he was with his brother. There wasn't a vault that could restrain Izuku.

“What if I don’t want to be helped?” Izuku groaned. “You always want something in return.”

“Not to worry, Izuku. This is an entirely free, complimentary service,” All For One purred.

Not encouraging. Nothing he offered was really for free. All For One definitely wanted payment, it was just going to be esoteric, vague and slowly shave years off Izuku’s lifespan the longer he thought about it. Instead, when All For One eventually requested payment, Izuku was going to run as fast as he could in the opposite direction and hope he could out range the warp before he was dragged back.

Then All For One came to a halt. “Doctor, I think Izuku’s ready for his excursion.”

Izuku perked up. “Excursion?” Outside? Where? It couldn’t be anywhere in public. All For One wasn’t that stupid.

“… Right…” The doctor stated so vaguely that Izuku had to wonder if All For One’s experimentation left Tsubasa a few more slices short of a full loaf.

And they both disappeared in a black swirl of ooze that singed Izuku’s nose hairs. The warp that All For One used when Izuku had made his attempt on Tsubasa. Two versions of the Quirk…

Not that Izuku had long to contemplate the implications. All For One fell out of the doctor’s warp with substantially more grace than Izuku. Izuku plummeted out of the air and found himself face first in a pile of snow. Whereupon All For One extracted and set him back on his feet. All of a sudden, All For One smothering him with warm piles of clothes made more sense.

“That was deliberate,” Izuku muttered.

“You did attempt to kill him.” That sounded halfhearted at best.

“He deserved it.” He deserved a lot worse in reality.

Izuku really really didn’t like the way All For One beatifically smiled at him after that response, so instead he took in the sights. An unremarkable clearing that Izuku couldn't identify, in an unremarkable part of the woods that Izuku also couldn’t identify. The only remarkable characteristics where the sheer size of the clearing and the amount of snow. This was more snow than he’d seen in recent memory.

“Why here?” Izuku squinted at All For One and only grew more suspicious when All For One’s smile shifted into a smirk. His hand twitched and Izuku leapt sideways, narrowly avoiding a wave of snow.

“We’re here so you can stretch your delicate wings and fly,” All For One gestured dramatically and Izuku spied a crackle of red and black energy. Calling One For All was a chore and Izuku immediately felt his bones groan under the humble weight of three percent, which he happily disregarded as he ducked and strafed All For One with snowballs that the supervillain sniped out of the air. Izuku was weak, but not everything was gone. His control was still intact and while One For All’s strain was greater, it also wasn’t the crushing burden it was beforehand. Izuku hadn’t lost all of his hard work. “Try not to break anything,” All For One added.

A relatively gentle pressure blast smashed into the ground at Izuku’s feet and Izuku could only ride the snow wave until he could spring off another tree. Then another. And another. And another as wave after wave of snow oscillated from All For One’s position. It was loose and fluffy, as if a small mountain of it had chosen this exact spot. It was like attempting to traverse and extremely aggressive treadmill that operated with a sine wave instead of a belt. That absolute sadist. Wave after wave and Izuku was slowing down as he was buffeted by soft ice.

Hitting the pile of white, Izuku felt himself tumble through a mound of the softest snow he’d ever been slammed into in his life. Not that Izuku had time to recover, he was hardly back on his feet before he saw the telltale black and red streak as another wave was readied.

All For One… wasn’t taking this seriously. This was the seventh

healthy mound of snow Izuku'd been carefully dropped into and Izuku was starting to suspect that All For One's selective snowdrift slam dunks were anything but accidental. The entire clearing was blanketed as far as Izuku could see and the floor was suspiciously stone free… but that didn't mean anything when All For One was involved. He wasn't limited by his injuries anymore and Izuku had the crushing sensation that All For One was finally putting months of Izuku's criticisms to work. And not in a way that was conductive to helping Izuku if All One For after centuries of laziness was now willing to innovate.

"Really?" Izuku gasped, now halfway up a now sagging tree after dodging another wave of white.

"I think you're doing exceptionally well given the circumstances," All For One called back.

"I don't want to do well, I want to excel," Izuku muttered more to himself than All For One as he leapt to another tree. This was pathetic. Even moving like this was wearing him out.

"Of course you do. Let's change pace." And All For One's waves of snow were immediately replaced with a familiar rush of red and black tentacles. Without bothering to spare All For One another glance, Izuku sprinted off into the densest part of the forest he could find. One For All swelled and Izuku felt his control slipping as he ran faster and faster to escape the carnage behind him. The pain fluctuated between agony and non-existence in a way that would've had Izuku scratching his head if it weren't for the impending Lovecraftian pile up behind him. He didn't have time!

CRASH. THUNK. THUD. THUNKTHUNKTHUNK.

Another tree fell in the woods and as someone currently using it to block All For One's seeking tentacles, Izuku could assure numerous philosophers that it made a sound with or without anyone being around to hear it. A very loud SNAP as the streaks of black and red sliced it in two, a hot knife through butter. Nerve Manipulation was extremely sharp and All For One's range on it was far greater than Izuku remembered from Kamino. Far more lethal.

He's been practicing. All For One who never practiced was practicing. Izuku lengthened his stride, smothering down an entirely inappropriate emotion that All For One didn't deserve. He was not getting brownie points for bothering to learn the basics of how his

Quirks worked.

Izuku couldn't compete with All For One's raw force. Not without breaking half the bones in his body. While normally, Izuku was willing to take one for the team, there was no team here and All For One had already gone to extreme measures to save Izuku after the last time he'd tried to wipe out the duo. If Izuku did maim himself again, who was to say Shinsou's Quirk wouldn't become another one of the long time residents within All For One? Whatever Izuku did, it had to be smart. And whatever it was it was, Izuku doubted the streak of brilliance was going to materialise within this encounter.

Instead, he sprinted as fast as he could and not once did he find snow that another animal or person had tread on. No discolouration, no bird song, no tracks or signs of movement, no animals, no anything. Only the trees and the unnaturally fluffy snow. And the sound of All For One's Search guided razor tentacles mowing down the forestry behind him.

Leaping, Izuku saw it. An edge of definite green and brown. No snow. No ice. No frozen sky. But a forest exploding with a healthy amount of greenery. It wasn't winter at all. The entire original clearing was the result of a Quirk, but why? Why snow? If it was warm now then what did All For One gain by shaving a few months off the timing? Why use snow when it could be so easily discovered even if Izuku jumped high enough? Why? It didn't make any-

-Then he was yanked back and Izuku felt his feet leave the ground, one before the other as he was seized by the ankle. Before he could even squint upwards to see where exactly the sun was positioned. Back to where All For One would be patiently waiting for his airborne delivery and there were no trees left to directly impede its progress.

Izuku had lost.

Izuku couldn't run anymore. He could hardly breathe. All For One's attempt to fix him hadn't restored Izuku's old level of fitness and even then Izuku would've been straining. All For One had run Izuku ragged, with the sort of sadistic impromptu challenge that Aizawa favoured on his good days. There was nothing Izuku could do free himself from Nerve Manipulation, but that didn't mean he had to take it without any mitigation whatsoever.

All For One would get his delivery… with a twist.

It was a calculated risk. Nerve Manipulation was already hooked

around him and Izuku reached into One For All and practically felt All For One's satisfaction within when Black Whip was forced to the surface, shredding his gloves, followed by a smug chuckle Izuku wasn't sure he'd ever heard from the real All For One. Black Whip which twisted and ripped through Izuku's arms in moments. Twenty percent was too much. Far too much for Izuku to handle. It should have torn him apart… but by some sheer miracle Izuku grit his teeth and held it together. Willed himself to hold together.

Nerve Manipulation retracted even faster. He knew. Search again.

Izuku's buckshot of Black Whip went sideways, netting four grand trees. Four trees were unceremoniously wrenched from the ground as Black Whip's tension combined with Nerve Manipulation's acceleration. And, glancing over his shoulder at Nerve Manipulation's source, Izuku flicked backwards over his shoulder and held on for dear life. He only needed one… but if All For One noticed beforehand….

Nerve Manipulation's previous rate of retraction had been positively leisurely. With the addition of four trees being flung in its same general direction, it was more akin to strapping on a helmet and being fired out of a cannon powered by Bakugou's sweat. Force equals mass times acceleration. Force that'd hopefully be enough to make All For One reconsider his grappling choices.

Three trees worth of mass disappeared with the distant sounds of moist lumber being mulched and Black Whip sputtered out on his left hand. One set of threads remained and with Izuku being dragged along behind it.

All For One had missed one.

One lone lot of unprocessed lumber that would be his undoing.

Twisting in midair, Izuku braced himself. Not that he could see anything with the freezing rush of air blinding him. Not that he needed to see anything.

Impact. The ground shook.

Izuku didn't so much land on All For One as he bodyslammed him into a nearby snowdrift with as much force he could feed into Black Whip's remaining high tension strands. Izuku's right hand cracked, but Izuku ignored the shooting white hot pain as the weight of his still flying anchor tree dragged both Izuku and his target even deeper into the

snow. Entwined together, blinded by white, all Izuku could do was brace himself as they hurtled through a mountain of cold. Bounce after bounce.

Cold. Cold. Izuku couldn't breathe.

With a twang, Izuku released his grip and they slid to a halt.

CRUNCH.

Izuku heard his requisitioned tree's final descent into its fellows shake the ground and coughed, even while his hand seared with pain. Was it worth breaking his hand to flatten All For One? With a soaring sensation that overwhelmed any and all pain, Izuku had an answer without much of a thought. Definitely. It was worth every moment to stick the landing and take the bastard down a notch.

Then, in the midst of Izuku's point score, there was All For One still pinned beneath him, who was shaking, before the madman erupted into chilling, peels laughter that sent more ice down Izuku's spine than any amount of snow. Before it abruptly terminated and Izuku vaguely remembered All For One telling him not to break anything.

"You've been practicing," Izuku groaned, acutely aware that he might have broken more than a hand if All For One hadn't been his designated crash mat. His designated crash mat who was already sitting up and reeling Izuku in for a closer look at the maimed arm.

"And you've injured yourself again," All For One tutted into Izuku's ear. "Here, let me look." Izuku wasn't exactly in a position to say no. Between the initial cat and mouse chase (that was more like a tiger chasing a far smaller, blind, three legged house cat), the return fire of wooden artillery and finally this, Izuku couldn't get in enough air to shove the old man away. Instead, leaning against All For One and scrambling for breath, Izuku could only watch his visibly broken hand be held out outstretched in All For One's own and the shredded remains of the glove tugged off. "You can't keep doing this to yourself."

And Izuku felt a tingle, then a furious itch and could only watch as his mangled hand twitched and pieces of bone bit by bit rearranged themselves into an undamaged limb. Izuku blinked and turned to All For One.

All For One who stared between Izuku's hand and Izuku himself.

“What?” Izuku wheezed.

“That wasn’t me, Izuku.”

Izuku’s breath shuddered to a stop. “What?”

“You hand healing wasn’t me… But it does resemble a portion of the cocktail we gave you to promote healing…” All For One experimentally ran his hand along Izuku’s right hand again and there was the normal sensation and nothing else. “Incredible.” All For One was still stroking Izuku’s knuckles with an emotion that Izuku could only at best describe as wonder. A rhythmic movement as he poked and prodded at Izuku’s hands. Exacting, precise and unnervingly gentle even by All For One’s recent standards when he wasn’t throwing forests at Izuku. Unsettling didn’t even cover it.

“You can’t wear gloves anymore,” All For One idly commented from what felt like a world away.

And Izuku snapped back to reality. He pulled away only for the fiend to immediately hoist him back. “What’s wrong with gloves?” And why the sudden interest in Izuku’s clothing choices? By all accounts, All For One’s only style change in at least the last century was to start buttoning up his coat. Though it did make Izuku wonder how much of All For One’s Quirk theft choices revolved around his unwillingness to change his wardrobe.

“Because it’ll hamper your Quirk usage.” And All For One went straight back to threading his fingers through Izuku’s own. “Maybe in the past Support items may have assisted you, but that’s no longer the case now.”

Creeping dread… and a distinct impression of smugness that wasn’t coming from the real All For One. All For One knew something. Both of them did.

“Hamper me how?” Izuku instead questioned, wishing he had enough energy left to flee from the conversation.

“Because you’re the same as me.”

And it clicked.

All For One knew.

“But you already worked it out, didn’t you, Izuku?” All For One

positively crooned. “You worked it out… You have my Quirk.”

“No… I…,” Izuku vehemently shook is head. One For All stockpiled each of its wielders wholesale and that included All For One as its creator. Did that mean it was stockpiling the Trigger induced drugs that kept Izuku alive for all those months he was catatonic? Is that why Izuku didn’t immediately lose an arm after he crashed into twenty percent wielding Black Whip? Is that why All For One within the Quirk had a spring in his step with the additional energy of his own duplicate to store? Is that… is that why All For One’s smug chuckle radiated through One For All? The Quirk already knew. Now All For One knew as well. Both the original and the original’s ghost were now on the same page.

“You have my Quirk,” All For One repeated dreamily as if he’d won the lottery. “All the things we can do.”

All the things we can do.

And Izuku trembled.

Chapter End Notes

As per usual, I hope everyone is taking care.

Lullaby

Chapter Summary

Hush... don't say a word....

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Sansa resolutely and vehemently disagreed with anyone who said that the police did nothing but collect villains from pro heroes. In the Age of Yagi, no police officer, let alone a detective, was going to be sitting leisurely at the station snacking on sweet treats. Oh no. They were out on the beat or they were being proactive. Even god wouldn't save the poor fools who made the mistake of thinking that policing hadn't changed in the short time that Yagi was given control over the force. No, Yagi demanded competence, he demanded results, he demanded that villains be found, evidence gathered and convictions handed out yesterday. As far as the bosses were concerned he was a model employee and it'd take a calamitous revelation (like tearing a paper bag off Yagi to reveal All For One) before his words were in any doubt.

The results spoke for themselves and, as much as Sansa and the rest moaned about the workload, the surveys for public safety perceptions were rising in a steady manner. The police, for the first time in decades, were making a dent in the ever increasing criminal population. It cost sports days, family dinners and a social life, but after years of stagnation they were finally doing what they did before Quirks and pro heroes stepped into the limelight. Sansa could honestly say, that while he'd never been ashamed of his position, that there was definitely more of a prideful swagger to the step of each officer. Their job was no longer a joke in the eyes of the public.

Yagi demanded excellence, but no one was going to blame Yagi for his dedication when it really was dedication instead of a mad scramble up the ranks. Years of working for All Might in a menial capacity that didn't even touch upon his skills must've grated for the experienced professional was what they had initially thought. Being All Might's PA was no minor job, but the extent of his duties now had to far surpass whatever work he did on behalf of All Might. Long days, non-existent sleep and the other duties Yagi undertook for UA would've left lesser people hollowed out husks of themselves. It was inspirational that he

went above and beyond the line of duty. But they were wrong.

There were… whispers about Yagi. No one knew how they started and no one really wanted to speculate on why they'd started. But there were whispers that Yagi had a more personal connection to the investigation and a far more personal link to All For One. A whisper, just the tiniest fleeting word on the wind, that Yagi had lost his son to All For One in Kamino. That his child had died in the same ruins from which Midoriya's body had been taken. That All For One had take one child and left the other to die an excruciating death, cold, alone and terrified in the dark. That Yagi was personally out for All For One's blood, city busting capabilities be damned for what he'd done. It also occurred to Sansa that it was quite likely that All Might also knew Yagi's son with the period the two had worked together for so long and he felt his fur bristle. Yagi's son. All Might's student. It'd be a blood bath.

Yagi who'd smack down All For One himself, Quirks be damned. Admirable. Crazy. Suicidal. Sansa had little doubt that if there was a way that Yagi was going to find it regardless of who or what stood in his way. And right behind him would be All Might looking for his missing UA kid. If the rumours were true it'd make Kamino a girl scout convention by comparison.

And if it was all true? Then what? How could they even confirm it? Yagi didn't have friends within the police. He didn't have a social life. He didn't chat or make smalltalk with his fellow colleagues. He didn't go out for drinks. He didn't indulge in any hobbies or chores in his lunch break. He only gave the barest minimum expected amount of courtesy wrapped around taciturn professionalism like a veneer. Yagi was the sort of one of a kind cop who stepped out from a nighttime crime drama into reality and made the general public's myths about cops like him real.

All Yagi had was the job. If Sekijiro Kan's smug, idiotic face couldn't register the cool pronouncement of death stalking his way through the corridors like the rest of the building's occupants because of that factor then it really was his loss. A loss of face or a loss of life, Kan wouldn't be wriggling his way out of this one. Not with Yagi's aura of menace inching ever closer, now that he was done savaging another person to score the dubious honor.

Vlad King, or Sekijiro Kan as he was now known with the stripping of his licence, wouldn't receive the luxury of a lawyer or even guards. It'd be just him and Yagi in a room while the rest of them stood

witness, for good or ill.

“He’s in a really bad mood,” Sansa remarked to Tsukauchi, struggling to lift his coffee cup without it rattling violently in its saucer.

“He was due to release Shigaraki from questioning back to the prison transfer team today,” Tsukauchi answered, in no better shape than the rest of them. “Shigaraki will end up back in that hole for the rest of his shortened life unless some miserable sap puts in the effort to save him from the death penalty.”

Absolutely no one saw anyone saving Shigaraki from his fate. All Might himself, the rumours said, had absolutely no intention of even lifting a finger to vouch for Shigaraki in spite of the clear mental instability found by the psychiatrists and even reported by All Might himself. His instability was definitely present, but it wasn’t the only factor in his behaviour.

Kurogiri, of all the unlikely candidates, had sealed Shigaraki’s fate. Shigaraki disregarded All For One’s orders on the regular, like the order to avoid Midoriya. The wailing manchild was a rogue agent to even his own benefactor who dropped him like a rotting carcass from a cliff the moment the opportunity provided itself to him. While All For One’s link to Shigaraki wouldn’t have helped, the fact remained that Shigaraki himself went above and even beyond All For One’s recommended depravity. It wasn’t going to be a happy appearance in front of the panel of judges and any lawyer paid to appear for him was going to need a bribe just to have them turn up to court. It was defending the indefensible.

“Yeah, that’s not happening,” a voice from behind grunted around a biscuit. “It’s about as likely as Kan old buddy old boy leaving here with all of his limbs attached.” There would be no reprieve for Sekijiro Kan. No darkness, no peace and quiet. If what’d happened to Shigaraki was an indication, Kan was only the next dot point on the list making its way down to All For One.

Suddenly, Sansa had a rather prophetic vision of what’d happen to All For One when Yagi and All Might by extension caught up with him. He could only hope both had the sense to evacuate the surrounding area before they attempted to eviscerate him.

Then it was here. They all felt it. A solid wall of approaching ill intent and the sound of scattered, retreating footsteps.

The observation room braced. The door to Kan’s interrogation room

hurtled open before slamming itself back shut as Yagi passed through the entrance at the full length of his gait. If the fixtures were animate, Sansa would've expected an expression of utmost terror as it frantically shoved itself back into the door frame. God only knows the rest of the observation room were racing for who could shove their chairs furthest back from the mirror.

Yagi lobbed a massive folder of Kan's allegations onto the table with a CLANG. "Sekijiro Kan, formerly Vlad King. I believe you already know why you're here." Yagi rarely spoke in a monotone, but when he did…

The room shuddered.

Kan was already worming around, trying to force air into his lungs. Sansa wondered if he'd be faster or slower than the other people who sat in that chair attempting to remove the inevitable sensation of Yagi's phantom fingers from around their necks.

"Maybe your games work on other people, All Might, but they won't work on me." Kan was brimming with the sort of delusional confidence that villains were wont to have when it came to dealing with Yagi. All Might. Really. Yagi, in this perp's eyes was All Might. All Might would be rolling in his metaphorical grave if he saw what Yagi now did for a day job. "I'm not like everyone else who ended up in here. I know who you are. I know what you are. I know your limits." There was an inaudible "as if" that rolled through the observation room.

The wall of malice flexed. Sansa's team hit the ground, covering their heads as they did so.

Yagi leaned forwards, only centimetres from Kan's face, his teeth bared in a rictus grin that would've had All Might recoiling in disgust. Kan whose confidence was fading rapidly as the colour of his face abruptly changed. "Do I look like All Might to you, Kan?"

Sansa could only hope that Yagi's son was put to a more peaceful rest than anything Sekijiro Kan would be experiencing during this process. Kan who triggered the involvement of All For One at Kamino by betraying UA to the League of Villains. Kan who was the reason for the abduction of Katsuki Bakugou, now Izuku Midoriya and the death of Yagi's child. Kan who was the catalyst for it all.

CRACK.

Sansa hardly blinked when Kan's body bounced off the newly

spidering cracks adorning the mirror and fell into a heap on the floor. Yagi hadn't even moved, not from what they'd seen. There wasn't even a grunt of surprise from the perp… as if any air had been ripped clean from his lungs moments before impact. Kan lay there, still struggling for air that'd never come.

The observers collectively shuffled their chairs to the outer edges of the observation room. When Yagi inevitably hurled the bastard clean through the mirror, there wasn't going to be a single person there to catch the body. Not a single soul would reach over to help the person who earned the ire of Yagi. Not a single person would volunteer their protection towards Kan either. None of them were so stupid as to think that Yagi wouldn't rip through them like wet tissue paper if he really felt like it.

There would be no sweet dreams for anyone involved in this interrogation, least of all Kan.

Katsuki heard Icy coming up behind him and reluctantly edged over to share his bench with the bastard. "You don't seriously believe that shit, do you?" Katsuki snapped. There was no way Deku would ever be complicit with the shit All For One was doing. Never. Deku ate a fucking building to keep the rest of them alive. Him turning around and helping the bastard who dropped it on him in the first place? Never. Deku was all about saving people and shitheads like the League of Villains were never part of the group of people that were meant to be saved. Unrepentant senior assholes like All For One scored a punt off the nearest cliff as the most efficient form of rehabilitation.

"Do I think Midoriya would willingly have anything to do with All For One?" Icy's infuriatingly level voice began. "No. Not if he had a choice, but-," and Katsuki didn't want to hear any fucking buts, "-Midoriya's idea of a choice isn't the same as everyone else." Icy didn't need his Quirk to send a glacier across the the bench.

"The hell does that mean?" It was an empty question. They both knew exactly what he fucking meant.

Deku wasn't normal. Deku hadn't ever been normal for a single day in his life as much as Inko Midoriya liked to pretend otherwise. Even before he had a Quirk there was an uncanniness to him that made Katsuki feel like a fly having his wings picked off with every single one of Deku's hyperaware comments. Then to find out that Deku's

kindred spirit in that department wasn't another hero, but Japan's preeminent, megalomaniac museum display. All For One who now had enough proximity to work out that uncanny similarity for himself. Oh they both fucking knew exactly what Icy was talking about, but it was another thing to not have the decency to at least feign a lack of understanding. Deku was a lot of things, but none of those things had ever earned him a direct link to All For One's psychopathy. Not after what the bastard was caught trying on.

"Midoriya maimed himself and threw a fight on national television so that I'd use my Quirk correctly." Icy held up a hand and it flickered into flames. "Ruined his prospects for an internship. I think it's safe to say now that Gran Torino only offered him one because they all knew Yagi." It was so hard to hold back the urge to squirm because when was the last time Katsuki had even thought about the internships? "But me? I wasn't even doing my best and I was snowed under by offers. He threw away all those opportunities just for that." Katsuki hadn't even bothered to think back on those implications before Icy mentioned them. But that… that was fucking terrifying. That was practically his own life he was tossing out the window for a wannabe who treated his classmates like pond scum. Why the hell did Deku keep doing this shit to himself?

"So what?" Katsuki knew what was what. Deku was more than willing to lose the battle to win the war. Deku, just like All For One, didn't give a single shit, let alone two shits, about what the broader community of anywhere thought of him. Doing whatever the fuck he liked regardless of injury, regardless of consequence and all Katsuki could see… was All For One baiting All Might and violently tossed his head from side to side.

"All For One wasn't threatening him the same way he was with you." Icy at least was starting blankly at a gathering of four clear siblings who were bouncing a ball between themselves while their parents hovered at a nearby bench. "You heard what Shinsou said. All For One was… accomodating or playing along even. All For One values Midoriya's input. Enough for a facade of closeness if Midoriya was that close without injury." Shit that was too delicate. They weren't fucking close. That was All For One being a creepy fuck and being handsy with Deku who never fucking wanted anyone anywhere near him. Yeah, Katsuki was partly to blame for that and it wasn't like he could turn back time to tell his younger self to take his head out of his arse. That didn't mean that Deku scaling All For One like a tree to give him shit for kidnapping Shinsou wasn't a scenario straight out of the Twilight Zone. Something was fucking *wrong*.

“Yeah, valued enough to fucking abduct Shinsou over it, return Shinsou’s Quirk and fucking sing Deku’s praises in front of him.” Katsuki shuffled uneasily. “I was fucking weirded out when I saw the bastard in the flesh you know. When he started talking about his Quirks, he…” Katsuki didn’t want to finish the sentence.

“He sounded like Midoriya. Or rather,” Icy inclined his head, “Midoriya sounds like All For One.” Folding his arms, Todoroki glanced away from the family. “All For One is well over a century old. It’s only natural to have another person appear with those same interests over that time period. Unnerving, I’m sure, but natural if rare.” Extremely rare. Katsuki hadn’t even heard about anyone else like Deku around the world, with his fucking Quirk dissection. If All For One was statistically one a kind he'd be over the fucking moon to find that one other outlier in the statistics that shouldn’t exist. Enough to drop that bag of shit Shigaraki and run screaming at the better outcome.

Katsuki didn’t let the tangent continue. This shit wasn’t why Icy was wasting his time on a bench that was closer to a rotting log than a piece of furniture. “You think Deku might be staying willingly to distract All For One,” Katsuki let the words explode out. He was free. For that moment he was free from the idea that was eating away at him. “Deku thinks that’s a choice he can fucking make, so he will.”

“Yep,” Icy said duly. “You saw it yourself. All For One’s been missing in action since the initial pull of Quirks and so have all of his operations the moment he had Midoriya. Whatever Midoriya’s doing to keep him busy is working.”

“And Deku will keep fucking doing it because it is working!” Katsuki’s hands exploded and the family across the park leapt into the air and scampered away. “Why can't he just fucking take care of himself for once? Why the fuck does he… does he…” Katsuki turned his face away, doing his best to ignore a wet patch on his cheek. “Why the fuck does he keep doing shit like this for people who don't fucking deserve it? If he was still Quirkless, this media circus of shit flinging apes wouldn’t have said a fucking word about what happened. They'd have slammed collateral damage down on some shit obituary no one would’ve read and called it a fucking day.” They wouldn’t have cared, wouldn’t have even wanted to know Deku. Deku would’ve just been gone, not even his own fucking mother would’ve commented on it. She already fucking wasn’t commenting on anything related to her son.

“And there’s the irony,” Icy concluded. “The only thing currently stopping All For One from stomping Japan back into the ground is the standards of a kid the media doesn’t care about. Wonder if that’ll make the history books this time.” Of course it wouldn’t. Why give the right people credit when they could pretend that their collection of amoeba were in any way equipped to deal with the problem themselves? Even All Might wasn’t getting a mention in the page of history they’d be leaving behind. Not after he caved in All For One’s head like a melon.

“We can’t just fucking leave him there.” Flexing his fists, Katsuki desperately wanted to sink it into one of the banes of his existence. Hell, he’d even take Nighteye at the moment.

“We’ll find a way,” Icy agreed and rose to his feet. “Well, I need to go find the old man. Visiting a family member who’s been missing for a while,” and it didn’t take a rocket surgeon to figure which relative that might’ve entailed.

“Later.” And Todoroki disappeared back towards Gran Torino’s building.

But would Deku choose to stay if it meant he could restrain All For One? Deku whose mere presence seemed to rein him in back from half the insane shit he did before? How long could both of them keep it together before one slipped up and shit well and truly hit the fan? If Deku had been healed then Deku still had One For All and all of the bullshit that came with it. If they waited, instead if Deku they’d find the fifty foot crater where Deku and All For One used to be and Katsuki didn’t have time for that shit.

Katsuki wouldn’t be sleeping that night. Even now, when he closed his eyes, he could imagine Deku trapped in that fucking bastard’s miserable, tentacle laden grip and he felt bile crawl up the back of his throat.

Not on his fucking watch.

Sensei was on cloud nine and there was nothing the doctor could do to knock him from that blissful perch back into reality. Izuku Midoriya had Sensei’s Quirk. Midoriya. Had. Sensei’s. Quirk. Midoriya. Midoriya who tried to kill him. Midoriya who tried to kill all of them. All the doctor could do was rock back and forth while Sensei waxed poetic about his latest discovery. Midoriya who had derailed everything.

Midoriya who made the doctor question everything.

“How wonderful. None of the candidates had the physiological capability to wield All For One without severe detriment. Then, by sheer dumb luck, there’s Izuku,” Sensei practically crooned and the doctor sweated. “Remarkable little Izuku.” Little Izuku who wasn’t ever meant to have a Quirk. The boy who now held All For One and Sensei’s coveted One For All. The one that got away. The one that he couldn’t recover.

“But Sensei… he’s…” The doctor struggled for the words. “He’s already tried to kill us, Sensei,” slipped out far more bluntly than intended. Sensei who was now fully healed because of the boy’s delirious comment on Quirk combinations. The doctor was kicking himself that he hadn’t thought of it first.

“After what I did to him, I should consider myself fortunate it was only one attempt.” Sensei’s faraway expression wasn’t indicative of a person listening to a conversation. “Not to worry, I’ve got all the time in the world to fix it now…”

Why was he here? Why… why was he listening to Sensei. Sensei who didn’t care about his own life. Sensei who didn’t seem to care if he’d die carrying out this fruitless attempt to satisfy his own curiosity. Pandering to Midoriya would help no one. There… there had to be a way out. A way out before Midoriya snapped and finished the job he’d already attempted.

No one remembered the doctor. He was too long lived and his identity had changed too many times to have to worry about what the rest of the profession thought. There were newer Quirks, newer injuries to investigate and, perhaps now, people would be more than willing to listen to his theories. If he even sold a fraction of technology he’d be wealthy for the rest of his days.

“Doctor, you understand what has to be done?”

The doctor licked dry lips, with only the faintest clue of what he’d been asked. “Yes, Sensei.”

All the doctor had to do was make a decision that let him sleep at night.

Knowing that One For All was an erstwhile fragment of All For One in

no way helped Izuku when he jumped to awareness in the mental plane and found the spirit wrapped around him.

“Izuku,” the spirit hummed, as though it was commenting from a great distance instead of its position around Izuku. Its head was buried into Izuku’s own overgrown locks of green and not for the first time did Izuku have questions about the logistics of spending your existence trapped within a Quirk. From All For One’s actions? It wasn’t great.

“All For One,” Izuku acknowledged, more than ever aware of the giant sized hands placed on his back and twitched as was appropriate. After all these years, Izuku was never going to get used to All For One’s attempts at being a human being. Shigaraki might’ve basked in the attention, but Izuku just felt exposed. Simultaneously smothered and left with raw flesh while standing in a hailstorm.

“Your parents never held you like this, did they?” Came the abrupt question and Izuku, being sandwiched into the spirit’s chest, had nothing resembling facial features or body language for guidance. Just that same vague tone. Haunted. Winding, looking for a way in, but a way into what Izuku couldn’t say.

Izuku blinked and thought back to when he was younger. Like this? A random out of the blue hug for no particular reason other than just because? Izuku shook his head. “No… not for a long time. Mum after the diagnosis wasn’t… you know…” Izuku shrugged. “It was different.” She may as well have been a different person. As far as Izuku was concerned, his mother was split into pre and post diagnosis. As if she’d become a different person in the space of a doctor’s appointment.

“But she had no reason to treat you differently. Why did she do it?” Still distant, still vague, Izuku wondered if One For All was having issues manifesting within the Quirk. There was no harm in running with it for now when the Quirk was still an unknown. The Quirk was already in his head and in theory knew everything when it wasn’t having performance related complications.

That didn’t make the questions themselves anymore comfortable. Or any easier to answer. They were opening up old scars, feeling them pull apart each wound piece by piece. Word by word. Memory by memory. “I don’t know,” Izuku answered the Quirk honestly. “We always assumed I’d be like everyone else and when I wasn’t… she…” Izuku’s eyes watered. “She changed.” No more supporting words. No

more encouragement. No more playing along with Izuku's dreams. “She just… didn’t think I could…”

“Because you didn’t have a Quirk,” the spirit confirmed, slowly stroking Izuku’s hair while Izuku was pinned and unable to pull away. “But her Quirk is nothing special. What position was she in to make that judgement?” Vagueness touched ever so slightly by a sibilant hiss.

Frowning, in the confines of his own head, Izuku thought. His mother rarely used her Quirk really. Even at home Izuku hardly saw her use it. It wasn’t something she was particularly proud of or skilled with or put to great use. It was what it was and was present but… it wasn’t important to Izuku’s mother. It never had been. But for some reason it became important that Izuku didn’t have a Quirk when society wasn’t allowed to use them anyway without a licence. Izuku felt marbles of salty water drip onto the spirit’s blazer. “Because I didn’t have a Quirk,” Izuku confirmed again. “Because… because I was different.” Because Inko Midoriya thought that her son had a birth defect… even though it shouldn’t have mattered. Because it mattered to her and… in spite of what Izuku wanted, in spite of what it would have done to ease his wounds… that’s all that mattered to her. What she wanted. Not what Izuku wanted.

“She may as well be Quirkless and still she judged you. What right did she have to do it?” All For One clarified and the vagueness was morphing into a far more familiar tone. An old friend who came to visit, but not a friend who was coming for him.

Hostility. Raw, unmitigated, rolling hostility that seeped through the mental space like a poisonous gas cloud. Bakugou would be green with envy.

Struggling again, Izuku made a feeble effort to free himself from All For One’s ghost. “She’s my mum.” But even that sounded hollow to Izuku’s ears. His mother treated him the same way that every stranger Izuku went to class with treated him. Like every teacher who mocked him for not having a Quirk and having no hope at a hero school. Like every stranger whose eyes filled with pity and made excuses to be elsewhere or offered platitudes. Like All Might who was himself Quirkless, and still threw out the words without a single sign of understanding of what he’d done. Why could All For One tolerate Izuku as a broken battered shell of a person who was explicitly barred from using a Quirk on health grounds? Why could All For One separate the person from the Quirk even when his entire existence revolved around Quirks more so than anyone else? Why did it have to

be him of all people?

“Is she really? Did she even attend your memorial? She doesn’t sound like much of a mother,” the spirit hissed.

Izuku didn’t contradict him. The bits and pieces were accruing and Izuku’s head throbbed with memories long buried that were floating to the surface.

“Did she know about Bakugou and what his friends did to you?” All For One carried on and Izuku shrugged. “She knew and sat there in silence?”

Did she? Izuku came home with burns and bruises on the regular from Bakugou’s explosions and… and… Tsubasa dangling and dropping him from heights and the gouges from nails ripping and tearing. Limping, bruised, in pain… and his mother watched him go without a single comment. No offer of help, no acknowledgement… nothing. “I… I came home with injuries and…” Yes, she had to know. If Izuku noticed Todoroki hiding frostbite in an arena packed with screaming people then there was no way Izuku’s mother couldn’t have opened a door to her scorched, burnt, bloodied son and not seen something was wrong. “I think she knew,” Izuku whispered with finality.

“And she never helped you,” came the cool, frosty response. No question. As if All For One had reached his conclusion before Izuku had ever given him the answer, which is exactly what Izuku would expect from a Quirk that was slowly finding its feet back in this plane. “She. Did. Nothing. Why didn’t she help you?” And Izuku’s expectations were thrown off yet again. “Why couldn’t she care about you?” A question that Izuku already knew the answer to that had ghosted all of his interactions with his mother for years. The real reason for why Izuku hadn’t told her about Kamino or the Sludge Villain or anything else of importance if it wasn’t force upon him. There was that creeping sense of unnaturalness that used to haunt One For All once more making its way to the forefront.

“I don’t understand why you’re asking me these questions. You’re already in my head, don’t you… already know what happened?” Izuku prompted the spirit and, as though Izuku had tossed a bucket of water over him, All For One shook like a large, extremely bad tempered dog. Izuku caught a glimpse of hair bouncing wildly as All For One regained his senses within One For All.

“Izuku,” All For One answered far more assertively, greatly relaxing

his grip and taking a step away. “That… wasn’t me.”

Ice slid down Izuku’s spine, the full sense of offness that hovered about the Quirk explained.

“Was that…” Izuku licked dry lips that shouldn’t have existed inside his own head. “Was that the other you? The real you?” The real All For One who’d just been told a mountain of Izuku’s darkest family secrets. “He… won’t remember… right?” All For One didn’t seem to have any insight into the Quirk beyond… beyond hearing himself posing as his brother during the first memory. Izuku’s heart sank.

The real Quirk shook his head. “He can hear some of what happens here… that I always knew, but I didn’t think he could speak here as well. His proximity is perhaps why he bled over to me.” Proximity? What proximity?

“He’s going to remember,” Izuku whispered, feeling his intestines twist in knots. All For One would remember what Izuku told him and… “And do what with it? It’s just about… me.” At least it wasn’t important information about anyone else’s Quirks or All Might.

“Yes, and perhaps act to clarify if his dream was merely a dream or perhaps instead intuition,” the Quirk speculated and Izuku couldn’t imagine how All For One was meant to go about clarifying anything without bringing All Might down around his ears.

“But why is he asking about these things? None of it is important to him, right?” It was another game that All For One was playing. The faux concern he’d given Shigaraki with more bells and whistles attached. It had to be. Why else would he tolerate being slammed through half of a forest?

“You’ll find that we have rather different priorities to you, Izuku.” All For One explained and patted Izuku on the head. Priorities that presumably related to the unknown whys that stalked every footstep and action of All For One. That dogged a name he refused to use and a life that may as well have never existed.

Those lingering emotions from the previous conversation evaporated in a blaze of heat and Izuku pushed All For One off him as indignation roared its way to the surface.

“Come on!” Izuku barked at the Quirk. “Why can’t you say anything? What’s so terrible that All For One, Japan’s oldest supervillain can’t talk about it?” What was so awful that even he couldn’t provide the

words?

“There are things far worse than butchering an entire city, Izuku.” Taken back, All For One reached up and… scratched at an itch on the side of his head.

“Like what?” Izuku demanded, trying not to stare at an action that'd be normal if it wasn't a Quirk.

“He lost someone close to him,” the Quirk whispered and the hairs on the back of Izuku’s neck stood at attention while a haze of blackness overtook the Quirk.

Izuku swayed. “What?” It couldn’t be that simple. What did that have to do with Izuku? It still didn’t answer anything! "But what does that have to do with me?"

“By the way, Izuku,” the fading Quirk continued in a conversational manner that immediately had Izuku on edge. “Do you remember where you fell asleep?” Far too smug and he faded away.

Eyes snapping open, Izuku choked down a noise of shock.

Izuku hadn’t fallen asleep anywhere. He, in not one of his brightest ideas snuck up on a snoozing All For One whose huge hands drooped into an easily examinable position if only Izuku could get close enough. Close enough to see if there were any markings on them, any sign of a Quirk factor that Izuku could verify before Izuku attempted to tamper with his own form of the Quirk.

Too close. Too late.

The bear trap snapped shut and without All For One so much as blinking, Izuku was dragged into the sleeping supervillain’s overwhelming grasp with a squawk of protest. That bastard of a Quirk knew about it and hadn’t reminded Izuku of the fact. And here he was, locked within the museum piece's grasp until he was ready to wake up. As the Quirk said... Izuku was in proximity.

Izuku jostled again in All For One’s dead grip and wriggled futilely to ease the hold on him. Contrary to the intended outcome, All For One constricted, enveloping Izuku in an even more smothering embrace. Short of firing up One For All and risking imminent death from either forms of the Quirk, there was an extremely good chance that Izuku was stuck like this until All For One had enough brain cells firing again to let go. More concerningly, there was the risk that an awake

All For One might be even more delighted with the situation than an asleep one. Butterflies gnawed at Izuku's stomach.

"Don't… little one," All For One mumbled in half a breath while readjusting his grip and Izuku froze, more ant beneath a descending shoe than a rabbit in the headlights. "I'll… buy you a mocking bird…" And All For One's face, for the briefest moment, the briefest snapshot of a second, crystallised. Twisted. Warped. Pain etched in every crease of flesh and feature. A whole body spasm as he clutched at Izuku. "Don't…" Holding on for dear life, as if… "… Don't go…"

The image vanished. Izuku had the terrible feeling that perhaps the Quirk hadn't wanted to talk about it… because whatever happened hadn't involved All For One the Quirk… but the very real person hiding beneath the Quirk.

The human being that existed before All For One.

All For One, who used his Quirk as a mask.

Who had no name.

No age.

No personality beyond that of a monster.

No reason for what he did. No cause or purpose.

No interests.

No hobbies.

No reason for existing beyond causing harm.

But a human being concealed by All For One.

Who murmured a lullaby to… to a child who vanished.

From within One For All, there was only a deafening silence, followed by a single lone sob from a shadow wrapped around the limp form of a child and Izuku's escalating, erratic gasps for air.

Chapter End Notes

> Yes, I'm still alive. Please enjoy this chapter with plot for compensation.

Replacement

Chapter Summary

> Is an object the same when it's had all its components replaced? Is it still the same object?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Izuku's heart hadn't stopped racing since he'd snapped to awareness in All For One's arms. All For One who dreamed of… losing a child. All For One who was currently snoozing contently with his face nestled against the side of Izuku's own. All For One who… was shifting… slowly… as though he was about to wake. Wake up while still wrapped around Izuku. Izuku who was only here because he was trying to poke and prod at All For One's Quirk factor.

Izuku twitched. Well, All For One hadn't reacted poorly to Izuku's previous commentary on his Quirk. Hopefully that wouldn't change because of this situation.

All For One lifted his head and yawned. Slowly opened his eyes to gaze at Izuku who blinked back.

"Izuku… why are you here?" All For One snapped to awareness with a speed that Izuku envied. Even with all of the early morning training he still wasn't anywhere near All For One's level for immediately shrugging off sleep. Though with the amount of assassination attempts he'd no doubt dealt with over the years it was to be expected. "Did I…?" He grimaced, gazing between both of them in a suspicious manner.

Izuku shook his head. "No, I… tried to take a look at your hands and you grabbed me," he finished lamely. "It was my fault for coming too close." It was a miracle that All For One hadn't splattered him all over the wall for being so close in the first place.

All For One struggled, his face twisting. Only for a moment, before a brief chuckle escaped. "What were you looking for?"

"Mutation signs." There was heat crawling up Izuku's skin. He wouldn't have to worry about any future plans for his murder, since the odds were he was going to die from the embarrassment of being

caught first. “I know the transfer itself is an Emitter type, but I was curious if there was anything else to it.” Even if Izuku had his own version thanks to One For All, it’s not like the Quirk itself was being particularly helpful in the instruction manual department.

“Oh, you sweet child.” The worst part about All For One’s reaction was that there was no real reaction. His expression hadn’t changed from the pleasant surprise it’d settled into since Izuku confirmed that he hadn’t been a victim of All For One’s sleep warping. “There’s no need to explain yourself. I… haven’t slept this well in years.” There wasn’t any need to see his face. All For One had inched out the words as if he’d expected retaliation for speaking them. Not that Izuku was any position to be dishing one out in these circumstances. Not with the blistering flames of humiliation still hovering around him. “Ever since I created One For All there’s been this feeling of loss,” All For One waved a casual hand through the air for a statement that was anything but casual. “But, not when I’m with you, as strange as it sounds.” Hairs on the back of Izuku’s neck shot upright and a shiver went through him. It shouldn’t have mattered if Izuku was close to All For One. The two Quirks were linked but-but All For One didn’t know that the Quirks were linked!

Izuku paused midway through scratching his chin with a free hand. “But you can’t even take One For All without consent. Why would you even feel that way?” There was a distinct cough at the back of his mind that sounded suspiciously like All For One, even though All For One’s mouth was distinctly closed.

Oh. Oh!

The Quirk. It had to be the Quirk! But which one? Was it One For All or All For One itself that had registered some sort of loss when All For One had been stockpiled within the Quirk? Quirks themselves had the necessary instinct for their use, but was it possible they contained more than a raw animal drive? Dark Shadow certainly had a personality of its own distinct from Tokoyami. At the camp it’d acted without Tokoyami’s consent and gone on a rampage once it gained enough strength from the darkness. So the goals of the Quirk and the wielder didn’t always have to perfectly align. Dark Shadow was happy to rip threats to Tokoyami into very small pieces, much like One For All was happy to do so on behalf of Izuku.

What if All For One had always been more than just a Quirk for giving and taking? What if All For One had always had more of a mind of its own but All For One hadn’t noticed it? The same as All Might hadn’t

noticed One For All's own clear agenda? Not every Quirk was vocal.

"Mental instability on account of the circumstances, I've always suspected," All For One dropped so indifferently that Izuku almost choked on his own tongue. These weren't the words of a person who thought that they were functioning in a perfectly standard capacity. "My brother's death never sat well with me. I thought that if I killed the One For All wielders that the sensation would fade, but even now it persists. It calls to me, as much as I try to ignore it." There was a shuffle. "After you died… it was even worse. I heard you in my sleep. Nightmares, words I could never catch, discussions that were beyond my hearing. I couldn't reach you beyond holding your limp hand." Discussions no doubt from when One For All sheltered itself and Izuku within All For One to cheat death as Izuku's corpse was being revived. The frown deepened and was growing ever larger. "I had one tonight about you and your mother. How she treated you." There was nothing joyful in that statement. The real All For One heard it all and wasn't happy with whatever he'd taken away from the conversation.

Izuku withheld a multifaceted wince. To tell him? To not tell him? For how long had All For One assumed that his stranger tendencies were neurological deterioration instead of his Quirk misfiring? Would All For One have been able to stop himself if he knew it was the Quirk's intent instead of his own? Bakugou and 1-A might be an indication of that as the more UA trained students and detached them from an instinctive use of their Quirk the more they seemed to shelve their impulses. Todoroki was another example as he almost literally warmed up to the class. Could All For One also be in that category? All For One who had absolutely no objections to waking up coiled around Izuku provided it hadn't occurred due to any sleep Quirking behaviours on his part?… Izuku had to tell him. All For One had to know what was really happening with his Quirk, if only because it might prevent him from maiming someone else due to its impulses.

Izuku awkwardly cleared his throat. "That wasn't a nightmare. That was actually me. She really did that. We share that mental plane because of One For All and how you made it." This was going to go about as well as Izuku expected it to go.

Silence. Rolling silence. Slow, calm breathing with an unbroken gaze. "What? What are you talking about, Izuku?"

"I… don't think it was entirely your fault. You couldn't have known." As far as Izuku was aware, All For One had no intuitive understanding of the Quirks he took beyond understand base activation. Hadn't he

said as much himself to one of the League at Kamino? He'd certainly mentioned it to Izuku on numerous occasions. If he didn't have that after acquiring the Quirk he definitely had no way of knowing prior to taking the Quirk. "The Stockpile Quirk you acquired for your brother always did more than just stockpile energy. Only there was no way for you to know about that until after you'd transferred it because it didn't have most of its functionality until… until it stockpiled you. Then it wasn't the same anymore."

All For One stared emptily at him and Izuku rushed on ahead.

"Your brother never had a Quirk," exploded from Izuku in a flourish. "The Stockpile Quirk you had wasn't subject to All For One's isolation from other Quirks. Instead of stockpiling only energy it stockpiled the whole person it was within - you!" Not just the person, but the Quirk! "It took all of you, including your Quirk. Your brother didn't have a Quirk that could transfer itself. He never did. The Quirk he used in reality," and the words might've been thick and fast but that didn't mean they weren't being caught in Izuku's own throat. "The Quirk he had in reality was All For One. A copy of yourself held within the Quirk that you unknowingly gave him. He changed, didn't he, after you gave him the Quirk?"

Numbly, as though he'd been floored by a cast iron skillet, All For One inclined his head up and down in what Izuku understood as agreement. "He changed after I gave him that weak Quirk," All For One whispered. "But…" All For One likely blamed it on the taste of power, not the inherent changes that came with being loaded with the personality of an entire other person. A shadow that exploded into full sentience with All For One's death at the hands of All Might. After so many decades of giving Quirks All For One had to know that Quirks altered personalities, but was he even aware of the extent they influenced their wielders? Probably not that it was this bad.

"It wasn't the Stockpile that did it. It was you inside the Quirk. You changed him. And everyone after him. One For All works like Trigger. The more energy it stockpiles the more it enhances everything it contains." Izuku inhaled deeply. One For All was simply All For One with the words in reverse. How hadn't they noticed before Izuku that it was all wrong? "The more it enhances its base Quirk, All For One, the more each wielder felt that until it got to me and… well, by the time it got to me, after you died and more of you came into the Quirk, then it could talk." Izuku shrugged. "It showed me why you gave your brother the Quirk and the vault he was in… And it also showed me that you could take Quirks without having any idea what those Quirks

were." Pausing, Izuku wasn't sure if he should mention the next part. "Even if you spent most of your time pretending to be your brother, but the advice he gave was the same as yours… and I caught you in the act." All For One's attempt at being non-threatening was to be anyone apart from himself and Izuku tried not to dwell on those implications. What a sad state of being.

"You have a piece of me inside you?" All For One's shadowy eyes were wide. Any calm obliterated by gasps for air. Rattling breaths that were only too familiar from years gone by that seemed more distant than ever after Overhaul. Izuku knew panic when he saw it.

"I have almost all of you it feels like," Izuku confirmed. "Some of your memories, probably all of your Quirks. The memories and Quirks of the other people who held One For All." Apart from All Might, but he was yet to be fully stockpiled. Hopefully not for a long while yet. "I didn't realise that you felt bits of yourself being torn away. I didn't realise that it made you… not you anymore." A shattered fraction of a person.

What Izuku wasn't expecting was All For One's borderline hysterical laughter. Ringing, frosty, disbelieving, bouncing off every wall in the room. "I gave him a part of my soul… and he tried to kill me with it," All For One numbly summarised. "I literally gave him part of myself and it wasn't good enough."

Izuku patted All For One on the shoulder as he would anyone in this situation after it was revealed that they were a fragment of a person. "Just because you care about someone doesn't mean that they'll ever care back. Look at my family." Or the one member that constituted Izuku's entire family because his mother never really cared enough to help and his father was a non-existent entity. Not for the first time, Izuku wondered if a mistake had been made. It certainly felt like it in hindsight.

"I hate your parents," All For One abruptly responded, almost as if he'd read Izuku's mind and there was the most remote possibility that some part of him had managed the feat. "And my brother… didn't deserve what I gave him, but if I hadn't given it to him, would you still be here? Would you exist without One For All?" Was Izuku alive because of All For One's questionable Quirk creation and self mutilation?

"Maybe not. One For All helped a lot of people, me included," Izuku shrugged. All Might wouldn't have been able to save him without One

For All and a villain would've walked away with Izuku's dead body.

"Why are you telling me this?" *What do you get out of it?* The unspoken question.

"I don't agree with you or what you've done, but that doesn't mean I want you to keep existing as half of a person. How much of what you did was because of what happened with your Quirk and how much was really your conscious decision making?" How had All For One gone from seeking order to blowing away cities as convenient distractions? How much of his original motive now lived within the One For All while the original person was a husk of his former self? Who was the real All For One at this point? "I think you need help, but how that happens is anyone's guess." It's not like there was a cage capable of holding All For One and with the government so complicit in concealing his existence, Izuku was starting to wonder if them laying judgement on him even meant anything after over a century of letting him run rampant. They had to know he was there because he was famous at one point and they did absolutely nothing.

"And nor can you give me One For All, when you'll suffer the same fate as I do now." All For One's head was bowed and Izuku agreed with the assessment. All Might's misty ghost already occupied the Quirk and if he had All For One's lifespan it'd be solid before he even died. "It chose you, didn't it? Everything that happened between me and All Might… all led to the moment that All Might gave that fragment of me to you."

"Yeah, it basically said as much," Izuku finished lamely. Utterly spent. It was bad enough that he'd accidentally spent the night as All For One's emotional support human, let alone waking up and breaking the news that he was a severely damaged person. More damaged than had ever been suspected by either of them.

"Thank you for telling me, Izuku. I… I need to think about this." And All For One fled. Izuku didn't blame him, because even now Izuku could feel a distant horror that wasn't his own ripple across space and time.

This wasn't a patch of forest Izuku recognised. The canopy overhead blocked out all traces of the moon and the night sky and Izuku's hackles immediately rose even as All For One settled against a tree with Izuku trapped in his arms. Nighttime outings weren't favoured by

All For One where Izuku was concerned, almost as if he expected Izuku to make a run for it in the dark even though Search's operation was alive and well. There was a deeper level of paranoia to the action that escaped Izuku's best attempts at analysis.

"You've been so good, I think you deserve to know why you're here." Izuku would have taken that statement better if All For One wasn't still holding onto him like a barnacle would a three hundred year old shipwreck. Instead he coughed sharply as All For One's grip further constricted around him. "You didn't have to tell me about One For All or what it contained." All For One gazed skywards at the nearly impenetrable tree line. "You could have carried on and never said a word. Why did you tell me?"

Wriggling against Japan's most notorious myth only had the man marginally relax his hold. "It would've been wrong not to tell you. Your Quirk…" Izuku struggled with the words. "It changed you. You shouldn't… your life shouldn't be dictated by your Quirk," Izuku whispered, feeling All For One's fingers card through his hair. All For One was touchy, but never this touchy. Something was wrong. Well, more wrong than All For One knowing he'd accidentally torn himself into pieces.

No one's life should be determined by a Quirk, but the Quirk was part of the person. An instinct that, if allowed, would turn the person into a puppet of the Quirk's deeper desires. Even with his age and experience, All For One wasn't immune to the whims of his Quirk. If anything, he more than anyone was ravaged by its presence, its unrelenting desire to consume and hoard. All For One, who gave up and took the Quirk's name as his own, because what was he like without it? They'd never know. With his age Izuku couldn't imagine him being able to live without it either. There had to be some method of easing the symptoms.

"But you can't really give away your Quirk, can you? Because it'll happen to someone else and they don't have the adaptions that you do." A guaranteed agonising death. Unless All For One harboured a particular contempt for such a person and Izuku couldn't help but think that Shigaraki was safer in prison than he ever was with All For One. The more Izuku thought of Shigaraki the more he saw a convenient experiment as much as he did a scapegoat. "Who even are you without the Quirk? If only there was some way of telling." Even All For One himself would never know and Izuku was slapped by a wave of helplessness. Was it even possible to fix someone as damaged as All For One when the Quirk keeping him alive was the root cause?

“And that, is why you’re nothing like my brother,” All For One hissed. “All I ever was to him was my Quirk.”

From One For All’s drippings of information, Izuku could believe that All For One thought it was the logical conclusion. “Your… soul fragment seems to think so too.” Even if it was far more subtle in its attempts to sway Izuku to its reasoning. There was little doubt in Izuku’s mind that his first trip down memory lane was an attempt at opening a dialogue more than it was an attempt to show Izuku the history of the Quirk. All For One wanted to be on Izuku’s good side from the very beginning.

“Katsuki Bakugou,” All For One began out of the blue, “is absolutely terrified of you.” Izuku attempted to shake his head only to be gently squeezed. “Let me finish, lzuku.” Izuku froze. “When Bakugou heard me I have little doubt that all he heard was you,” All For One practically breathed. “Your insights, your analysis, the way you used Quirks against their holders to pluck at them and pull them apart bit by bit as you wrenched your way through their tender egos and psyches. The way you’d see right through them which had power in and of itself. The manner in which you exposed him as a mere dismantled insect held on the microscope slide of his better. He looked at me and saw those same qualities he saw within you.” All For One paused. “And that’s exactly how my brother looked at me. It wasn’t my Quirk, it was how I saw through people. It was how I viewed him. It was because I didn’t believe the intent behind his statements as being genuine.”

There was a cold shiver that went through Izuku that had nothing to do with the weather or the pile of leaves they were perched upon. “But, I didn’t want to hurt anyone and Bakugou still did what he did.” But it didn’t matter. What Izuku wanted never seem to matter much to anyone. It was always about what they thought and nothing else.

“Neither did I, really. At the beginning, I simply wanted my brother to be safe,” he shrugged with one arm. “But that’s not what he saw. He saw my accumulation of allies, my refusal to bend to the whims of a government that did nothing to protect us and he was threatened.” That Izuku could wholeheartedly believe. All For One’s brother who’d always seen All For One as the Demon King. “My control over the criminal underworld is part of why Japan has enjoyed such a prolonged and diminished crime rate, but my brother didn’t see it that way. He viewed it as exploitation.” Japan’s relative state of peace was a joint effort in the middle of a blood feud that the government would never formally acknowledge. They could never admit that All For One

existed or they'd send more people running into his waiting arms.

"It was exploitation of their circumstances, but," Izuku grimaced, "it's not like they had to agree with anything you offered. They could've said no. I don't understand why your brother thought that they had no responsibility for what they did." All For One was the catalyst, not the cause. If it hadn't been him it would've been someone else on who they would've shoved any and all personal responsibility. There'd been countless criminal gangs that proved this theory, the League of Villains among them.

"Because it was easier for my brother to see me as a monster than someone who wanted to take care of him." A murmur. "He was sickly and helpless, an easy target for the roaming gangs of misfits and degenerates. Two birds, one stone. I could take care of him and he could reap the benefits of my efforts." An ego boost and his brother conveniently nearby, right up All For One's alley.

"But he didn't want that…"

"No, he longed for society's approval, not any of my demonic assistance." Another mirthless laugh. "My brother never accepted me for who I was, I was never good enough for his lofty goals of endless self sacrifice for people who hated me for how I was born." Resisting the urge to shift uncomfortably had never been a more difficult task for Izuku. "And then he died, passing on the Quirk I created to help him and with it the order for my death." Straight down the line to Izuku who died entirely on accident. Probably not as the plan intended but life and death worked in mysterious ways, especially when All For One was a factor.

"And here we are," Izuku concluded, still feeling at a loss. That didn't answer why he was here.

"Not quite. There are some things that are worse than the betrayal of a brother." All For One's voice had dropped.

"Like?" Izuku winced. All For One's twitchy clinginess wasn't doing any favours for Izuku's increasingly tender ribs. If Izuku didn't know any better, he'd say that his kidnapper was anxious. More anxious than the previous day when Izuku had given him the bad news.

"How would you feel if you were responsible for the death of your mother?" All For One whispered and Izuku felt his stomach sink through the grassy floor. Izuku really hoped that was rhetorical and not an indication of All For One's night time wanders. "That all of

your actions, every breath, every word, every failure to act, would result in their death? That everything you did led up to that single moment of their demise? And you could've stopped it, if only you'd paid attention. If only you'd intervened." Filled with fervour, this wasn't All For One as Izuku tentatively knew him. This was something else entirely. "If only you'd been involved and *done* something."

"I… don't understand," Izuku confessed and All For One's grip relaxed, allowing Izuku to breathe.

"You are here because I killed my son and ever since his death I've been struggling to work why it happened. How I could let it happen." Pained, each word clawed its way out of his mouth and filled Izuku's ears with perfect clarity. "Hunting for closure that none of my digging into his life could ever provide me."

Izuku stared, his mouth open and wordless. His eyes wide. Stared at All For One who easily made eye contact, his face still a distorted blur. Stared and stared because…

"My son died because of my actions and I was left picking through the wreckage." A child. The child. All For One's son. Izuku's breath caught in his throat. All For One's screaming grief for his own lost child. A memory so deep it traumatised every part of his soul, even the part an entire person removed from him.

"A son…" The brother wasn't the only family. And All Might… hadn't ever known. It must've been years before All Might ever had One For All for him not to know about it. All For One had a son! Had. Gone. His son was gone. His wife was gone too, then. It would've been decades ago.

All For One inclined his head, his voice unwavering. "He killed himself by entering the crossfire of a so-called villain and hero. For the longest time I thought that it was an accident, a stray blow that caught him as he panicked and ended his life." Bowing his head, All For One continued, "but that's not what happened. I was wrong." A son who killed himself… because of All For One. "I was wrong and there was no body left to bury. No last glimpse of him before he was put to rest."

Izuku didn't know what he'd been expecting, but it wasn't that. "I-I don't know…" What to say? How to respond? What to feel? "How?" Maybe… maybe with more information…? More information to smother the bile crawling up Izuku's throat.

“He didn’t care for his own life, Izuku,” All For One bluntly stated, caressing Izuku’s face with a feather touch. “We neglected him to the point that his own life meant absolutely nothing to him. Who needs the Bakugou recommended method of a suitably tall building-” Izuku winced “-when there’s an entire wealth of villains to do the deed without breaching your life insurance conditions? And society encourages heroics, does it not? And he didn’t use a Quirk, so he most certainly didn’t die because he breached the law, did he? What did it matter if a child who hadn’t even finished school ended his life at a whim?” With every word growled from All For One’s throat, Izuku became acutely aware that All For One’s resentment towards All Might wasn’t a result of All For One’s death. It was far older, far more deeply rooted like a mangrove erupting from a swelling ocean of loathing. “And I couldn’t save him, because it was too late to stop him from being there in the first place.”

Izuku was expecting a sob, a wail, some sort of additional emotion to be dumped on him, but All For One never opened those floodgates. There were no tears, no apology… it was absolutely nothing like his mother’s tearful apology all those years ago. There was only the grief for a child Izuku couldn’t ever meet and who All For One hadn’t been able to save, so unlike Izuku himself. “My condolences,” Izuku offered, knowing how hollow that’d sound. “I don’t want to make assumptions, but…” *Do you think he would’ve been happy that a supervillain cared more about his son’s death than my father ever did mine?* Instead, Izuku let the sentence hang. He couldn’t do it. Not now. Maybe not ever. It didn’t matter. His father hadn’t ever mattered. It was petty to even think about. All For One might be a fiend, but his son hadn’t been and Izuku owed his memory that much.

“All we can do is make assumptions, Izuku,” All For One explained, punctuating it with a stroke of Izuku’s woolly hair. “I’ll never really know who he was before he died. He never spoke to his mother about his wants or needs. He had no friends to remember him and left little behind in way of material finds. The instant he passed away he was a ghost. And in all the years I had beforehand, I never once spoke to him.” Izuku could have shoved All For One away. He could, because All For One’s touch was a featherweight. There was nothing physically holding him at this point, if he could rip himself away. It wasn’t so much that All For One was pinning him as Izuku was being crushed by the weight of another person’s grief. One For All’s deafening silence only added to its obliterating impact. The memory All For One didn’t want to think about, now a memory that Izuku also didn’t want to think about. A senseless death because two parents couldn’t bring themselves to take care of their own son.

“My son didn’t enjoy merely living. For a time he wanted to do so much more and, at around the same age you received the near fatal news, so did he. You were Quirkless,” All For One’s soft voice carried without effort, “and he was too.” Izuku’s stomach sank like a stone. “From that point on his life went into free fall with only the most grim prospects within his reach. At school he had no friends amongst the teachers or students. He was different and unwanted. At home his mother couldn’t bring herself to so much as utter a warm word of support let alone discuss his misery.” Izuku’s thought of his mother’s sobbing apology and fought away the water attempting to force its way through his tear ducts. “In her eyes, his dreams should have been flights of fancy that passed him by. Passed him by for her sake and for what she guessed to be his sake, not once understanding that it wasn’t her decision to make. She never acknowledged that her son wasn’t a clone of her or her husband. A husband who wasn’t even present in either of their lives.” Venomous. His every word dripped with poison. Izuku could sympathise with every drop. All For One’s outrage wasn’t limited to only himself. It certainly explained his contempt for Izuku’s own father.

Thickly, Izuku nodded. He could only nod. Cutting in at this point seemed less like an intrusion into All For One’s grief and more like an entire army marching across foreign borders. For how long had All For One choked on these memories? A dead son he never knew to go with the dead brother who hated every fibre of his being. Fitting for All For One who’s only social skills related to how well he could peer into the Quirk of another and how would he do that to someone who was Quirkless? Izuku shifted awkwardly, as layers of magnification were applied to Izuku’s time with All For One. Or perhaps in reality, All For One’s time with Izuku.

“And because of that, my son is never coming back. Forever a ghost of the faintest memory of someone who never truly existed because no one cared enough to hear him speak. All because we couldn’t accept him for who he was…” Izuku’s mother would never accept him for who he was as lie after lie piled up as she pretended to care, only to lapse back into her guilt trips and wallowing. Izuku didn’t need to know All For One’s son personally, because even long after the boy’s death Izuku could perfectly imagine what went through his head as he died. Nothing but serenity. “But you,” All For One whispered almost with relief, carefully running his hand through Izuku’s hair, “are not him. My son died because of what we did to him, much like how you faded away because of the neglect of your parents.” All For One sighed, long and agonised. “But I saved you when I couldn’t save my son. You’re so very real and alive,” and Izuku squawked as All For

One clutched at his hand. “And you made it so much clearer that what happened to him was my fault.” Izuku didn’t see All For One’s eyes glisten in the dark. He saw nothing. Definitely nothing. He didn’t…

“You can’t save everyone.” Hesitant didn’t begin to describe how Izuku was feeling. If he made one wrong step he’d shatter like glass and it had nothing to do with the mourning old man’s presence. “The first thing we learn is that we can’t save everyone.” No one had that power, but with All For One’s skillset he was definitely more able to than most as far as his options were concerned. More able to feel the guilt for his failures as well, now that Izuku knew he was capable of the emotion.

“But I should’ve been able to save him too,” All For One snapped. “You’re not my son, but I still ruined your life by allowing your parents to do what they did to you.” A deep shuddering breath. “And like my son, you perished in the crossfire for a petulant brawl you never should’ve been near let alone involved in.” Izuku froze. “It was me. It was my fault.”

You’re not my son, but I still ruined your life by allowing your parents to do what they did to you.

The words reverberated in Izuku’s skull. His tongue thick in his mouth. All For One… let what… happen to Izuku?

Izuku’s heart pounded in his chest. “Then… then why…? Why even know me?” Why go to so much effort of a stranger when Izuku shouldn’t have meant anything to All For One? They weren’t family. By the man’s own admission they were nothing to each other. Unless… unless All For One was repeating a familiar behaviour. Was it really that simple? All For One was still All For One after all, even on his best behaviour. “You couldn’t have your son, so you stole someone else’s,” Izuku answered himself, feeling his stomach twist in on itself. It was so typical of All For One. So very very typical. So desperate when All For One had placed so much stock in the blood family who never understood or wanted him… until he found better and went elsewhere. It was a familiar feeling and Izuku’s mind flashed to All Might. All Might who supported him when his parents never did. And All For One had followed suit.

All For One squeezed back in response. “I did what I know best.” And stole someone else’s child. Stole more than one if Shigaraki was any indication. “I tried to fill the void that only grew after he died.” An unidentified void for his own child who he hadn’t known or met. It

was doomed from the onset as All For One struggled with both the urges of his Quirk and his own guilt screaming at him in the dark. Nightmares that weren't just his death at the hands of All Might. His son's tiny broken body, all the while the father screamed. Izuku wondered if All For One even remembered what his son looked like after so many decades.

"With Shigaraki?" Izuku cautiously ventured, only to be rocked by a nearly mirthless laugh in response that was more disbelief than general amusement.

"Tomura Shigaraki was never my first candidate," came the toneless reply. "You were my first choice and… nearly my only choice. A child with only one parent… a nobody, really, who could disappear at a moment's notice without the usual fanfare. I wanted to see if I could make a difference." Izuku could only twitch as All For One nuzzled him once more as the implications of All For One's words mounted their offence against Izuku's overloaded brain. All For One… had known about Izuku… before All Might, because All For One wanted… wanted a… replacement for his son? "Then you grew older and it became clearer that you favoured other manners of dispute resolution." As if All For One's tyranny to lock down the criminal population was a petty conflict for him. After mowing down generations of criminals, it may as well be a petty conflict where he was concerned. "I thought that you, like my son, would be happier without me since you, like him, favoured heroes instead of people like me." Izuku didn't know what to say. If All For One hadn't been a mass murderer who engaged in copious amounts of human experimentation and torture, Izuku probably wouldn't have cared at all about All For One's roaring Quirk trade if he only targeted other crime lords. But All For One was, and had been for a number of years and his past would forever dog his every footstep. Even now, All For One persisted in his behaviour… to facilitate saving Izuku. All For One would carry out his goals by any means necessary and that was something Izuku could never agree with in any capacity.

But, like with his son, All For One had kept his distance from Izuku. Hiding his involvement, his interests, his everything in the anticipation of Izuku's rejection. Hiding everything apart from the doctor… who had been there since the very beginning, as he no doubt reported Izuku's Quirklessness back to All For One who no doubt was thinking of another Quirkless boy. And, like back then, hadn't involved himself until it was too late. All For One who thought All Might would be enough to blockade Shigaraki's petulant efforts, not knowing the severity of the injuries inflicted upon All Might. Not

knowing how close Izuku had come to death until presumably after the incident with Muscular.

“Who is Tomura Shigaraki?” Izuku instead asked, trying to ignore the sensation of All For One leaning in for what had to be a hug. Was it really Izuku he was embracing? Or was it a memory of his dead son projected onto Izuku? Izuku, the ideal outcome to the son’s unfortunate reality.

“His real name is Tenko Shimura. He was your pale, intangible substitute,” All For One snorted with derision. “I placed my concerns for your response to me far ahead of Tenko Shimura’s wellbeing.”

Izuku inclined his head. “Shimura…” The name was familiar, only ever so vaguely. *Nana Shimura*, One For All hissed, *the seventh*.… The seventh One For All wielder who was another victim of All For One’s unhinged attempt to reclaim that missing piece of himself. All Might’s predecessor. “Is he related to Nana Shimura?”

“The Quirk?” All For One asked knowingly and Izuku again could only nod and then he smiled serenely. All For One and his shattered soul slowly coming into alignment after a century of attempts at mutual destruction.

“Yes.”

“Why?” Disappointment, because clearly Izuku had underestimated the depths of All For One’s instinctual drive to be reunited with its errant half. His rage at the separation.

“I was going to throw it in All Might’s face you know,” and while Izuku didn’t know for sure, he certainly could imagine the spring that’d be in All For One’s step for doing so. “But now after everything it feels even more hollow and pathetic.” All For One rolled his shoulders. “All those wasted years I could’ve spent with you instead and All Might wouldn’t have been there to stop me. I could’ve thrown Tenko at his front door, much like I did Shinsou and the girl, and he’d have been far too busy with Tenko’s psychotic behaviour to notice my presence disappear.” And Izuku from a far younger age, with no One For All, would’ve been forever trapped in the newest vault of All For One’s creation with neither of them ever knowing the real cause for the behaviour. No rescue for either of them.

“Why? What did Tenko Shimura ever do to you?” Izuku jabbed a finger in All For One’s direction. Anything to not think about-about-

“He murdered his entire family when he was five years old, Izuku. Decayed them into blood splatters decorating the yard of his father’s grand home in retaliation for his family’s abuse of him,” All For One drawled. “He killed others after the fact with little to no provocation. By taking him off All Might’s hands I did him a favour. Nothing All Might did ever would have been good enough. All Tenko Shimura has ever done is seek out excuses to justify his emotional shortcomings.” As much as Izuku wanted to refute All For One, his brief chat with Shigaraki after the Festival came to mind and Izuku didn’t have a lot of difficulty believing All For One in this case. The feeling of an insistent, furious approval from within the bowels of One For All only added fuel to the fire that All For One was, if anything, leaving out the details of Shigaraki’s lifelong depravity. For All For One to know that the family died meant he was involved in some capacity. He probably stood there and did nothing to help anyone while gleefully thinking of how All Might would take the revelation. Not that it really mattered when All For One himself would’ve followed immediately after All Might on the list of targets.

Izuku frowned. “Was he… born that way?” Or was it Decay itself which seemed to thrive on destruction? Was Tenko Shimura the same as All For One?

“He was born twisted, even without the Quirk, I suspect. His father was a fiend filled with hypocritical notions of family obligation all the while beating his own flesh and blood and Tenko Shimura shared that entitlement.” All For One smiled without any humour. “He expected the world to save him even as he planned the demise of the very people he wanted to assist him.”

“Not like you then,” Izuku mumbled aloud and felt All For One stiffen. All For One had a purpose for what he did, even if it was a bastard about it. He didn’t expect anything from anyone at this point without him paying for it and that was part of the problem. His sense of charity was nonexistent.

“Hence why you were the first choice and he wasn’t,” he reminded Izuku and Izuku tensed. All For One’s first choice… Words that would scar Izuku for the rest of his life. Words to go with the scars that All For One’s revelation of lifelong stalking had already added to the growing pile. “I could never treat him the way I treat you. Nothing I could have done would’ve prevented his inevitable betrayal. Better to have him as a doll, then with the skills to be successful in his backstabbing attempt.” And with a single thought All For One’s lack of interest in Shigaraki made a terrifying amount of sense. And in that

same thought his obsession with Izuku gained far more acute meaning as Izuku finally saw the bars of the cell that All For One had been so desperate to hide.

“Those plans are long gone now,” All For One shrugged. “I… don’t hate All Might for giving you One For All.” A confession, as if All For One had dropped some momentous weight from his shoulders. “Without One For All you wouldn’t have made it as far as Kamino in the first place, would you?”

Izuku didn’t answer. All he could think about was that tiny shadow’s broken body within One For All’s memories and All For One’s implication that he didn’t think Izuku would’ve made it past high school. One For All that mirrored the trauma of its creator. Pulling in on himself as All For One’s revelations crashed over him.

“I’m not your father, Izuku, but I desperately want to be. Let me help you.” Because All For One, like All Might, made the discovery that blood relations meant nothing, as evidenced from the treatment of Izuku’s own family. Just like All For One attempted to help his brother, now while caught in the throes of losing a son decades ago. How long had he waited for Izuku to come along? What had he done to ensure those circumstances as he nearly made off with someone else’s child? To fill the gaping void that was part grief, part Quirk in nature?

Izuku couldn’t reply, frozen in place by a thought from before. A thought where maybe… maybe he had the answer.

Do you think he would’ve been happy that a supervillain cared more about his son’s death than my father ever did mine?

And there Izuku remained for the rest of the night, his kidnapper entwined around him, wondering if All For One would ever be capable of letting go. Or if the Quirk would forever have both of them trapped within its grip.

Chapter End Notes

coughs So who called it?

Realisation

Chapter Summary

An awareness. An achievement.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Katsuki was trying not to think about the silence in Deku's apartment. It was far too quiet even for this shithole of a suburb and the padding of his feet towards the kitchen sounded entirely too loud. For an apartment block, the silence was too fucking oppressive and there was something wrong in that statement alone. It gave him the creeps in an apartment block that was filled with the sounds of everyday criminals and Inko Midoriya's media entourage at any other time. Within it was missing the most obvious white noise. A rustle of paper. A quiet noise of frustration. A smothered sound of glee. All noises Deku wouldn't be making while he was stuck with All For One. If he was making any noises at all after the shit he was giving All For One, according to Shinsou.

A faint glimmer of light from the kitchen wasn't helping his mood either. He could've sworn he turned off all the lights before he went to bed, no, some idiot had left a fucking light on. With renewed irritation, Katsuki stomped over and narrowed his eyes within the kitchen.

The fridge was open. Just a slither, because there wasn't enough weight there for it to close itself and not enough of a gap to trigger the sensor. Like something had been pulled out and whoever did it hadn't bothered to slam the door like a respectable person. Neither Katsuki nor Mrs Midoriya had been anywhere near the fucking fridge before both of them went their respective ways.

"What the fuck?" Katsuki muttered and slammed the fridge shut without further ado, feeling his heart rate speed up. A rustle of a phantom breeze against the hairs on his neck from a movement that should've have been in the room. There was a faint scent of some bullshit cologne that hadn't been there beforehand.

There was more than two people in the apartment.

Someone else was in the apartment. Katsuki should've heard them

enter, so who the fuck-

-Katsuki spun around. And there it was, a shadow perched at Mrs Midoriya's dining table. For a moment, Katuski could've mistaken it for Deku himself. The pose was too fucking familiar, bent over a small pile of books as he paged through them. Katsuki took a step closer and there he fucking was, right out of Katsuki's worst nightmares. Unmasked, Katsuki could see a shock of white hair and a face hazed in unnaturally deep shadows, but the suit was the giveaway, exactly as it was at Kamino.

All For fucking One, in the flesh and sitting in Mrs Midoriya's apartment with a bundle of reading material. Right here. Right now. Only metres away from Mrs Midoriya and he was more than capable of levelling the entire Ward.

"What the fuck do you want?" Katsuki hissed, acutely aware of what exactly would happen if Mrs Midoriya woke up and came over to investigate. His flexed his hands carefully. Whatever was going to happen, he wasn't going to let this bastard bury more people under piles of concrete. Over his dead fucking body. "Wasn't killing Deku enough for you?" Outright blowing All For One's shit in wasn't going to end well for anyone in the building.

There was the vaguest impression that All For One had blinked. "It was far too much for me, Katsuki Bakugou." His voice was only above a whisper… and was completely fucking different to how he'd spoken at Kamino, like he was pretending to be a normal person. "His death wasn't intentional and I've made that clear to him."

Katsuki's heart froze in his chest. Shinsou saw Deku alive so… so… "He actually fucking died." The quake of tonnes of concrete, glass and rebar quaking and it hit the ground. Deku covered in dust, his glassy eyes staring into eternity. All For One taking him away… Deku… Deku… Gone. Gone. Gone.

"Yes. Cardiac arrest. His heart stopped and he was clinically dead, but we managed to put him back together again." And Katsuki snapped back to reality, breathing heavily. All For One watched on, leaning on one hand. Unmoving. "He's recovering with time. We do have some remaining obstacles to clear and that's why I'm here." He waved a hand. "As it turns out, not all of his current misery is as a result of my direct actions, so here we are!"

He felt his hand twitch and resisted the urge to spark wildly. "What

the fuck does that mean? You fucking dropped a building on him, you arsehole." The odds weren't great. Sure, Katsuki could clear the gap and potentially land a blow… but if All For One was still carrying his Air Cannon then entire building was going to disintegrate in retaliation.

"You won't clear the gap before I retaliate, Bakugou," All For One responded, as if he could read minds. Not that he needed a Quirk for that, since Deku did the same shit on a regular basis for over a decade. "And even if you do clear it, the force you'll need to generate is likely to dislocate both your arms, which doesn't leave you in any position to prevent me from addressing more… direct questions to Inko Midoriya." The prick smiled unpleasantly and Katsuki knew exactly where he stood. The old bastard was here sniffing for dirt.

"Holy shit, there's fucking two of him," escaped his mouth before he could stop himself. So painfully familiar and from Deku's murderer no less. All For One had found, killed, then brought back from the dead the one person who was like him and it make Katsuki sick to the stomach that it was Deku of all people.

"Yes, it is rather sweet when Izuku dissects someone with a glance, isn't it?" Fond. All For One sounded fond, almost as if he'd taken Katsuki's comment as a compliment. "But I doubt that endeared him to everyone when Quirks are such a touchy subject for the uninitiated." Now that was fucking hostile.

He couldn't listen to this shit anymore. "Why the hell are you here?"

"To help Izuku with his recovery."

"And you expect me to believe that, do you?"

"Right now? No. But there is an explanation if you'll hear me out." Not that Katsuki had much of a choice. "Allow me to make a proposal," All For One murmured. "We share a mutual interest in the outcomes that will follow this conversation." Oh no. Katsuki knew how this shit went and normally the benefiting party came away with either their limbs, soul or Quirk missing.

Katsuki's breath quickened. "Yeah, like what?" He snapped. There was nothing coming to mind that Katsuki could attribute to the word "mutual"… unless the prick had a death wish.

"We both want to see Izuku reach old age and I have my doubts as to that happening if an intervention doesn't occur. Something happened

when he was much younger to make him this way and I want to know why." All For One's hand was clawing into a fist and Katsuki's eyes flicked to Mrs Midoriya's room. This wasn't an investigation. The bastard already knew what had happened and wanted more. "If you assist me, I'll tell you all about Tomura Shigaraki." There was a "who fucking cares?" In the back of Katsuki's head waiting to erupt, but he bit his tongue.

"Why are you digging into this?" And not anyone fucking else on the planet. All Might had more of a right than All For One did.

"Society is too busy giving Inko Midoriya gold stars for the little she did do… and not penalties for the more extensive list of what she didn't do," he hissed, making Katsuki's breath catch in throat. "Nobody is asking why Izuku Midoriya keeps throwing himself into these situations for strangers who don't know anything about him." So that's what this was about.

"You mean me, right?" Who else was it going to be?

"And myself," was added in an undertone that had Katsuki taking a step forwards. No. No All For One fucking hadn't. How the hell had Deku helped All For One? "And none of us deserve it either."

"And you want to know why Deku would help a fuckwit like you," Katsuki clarified, feeling All For One's intent crystallise.

"Precisely, and I want to know how Inko Midoriya eradicated so much self worth from him that would place himself at risk to help people like us." There was a hand wave between them and Katsuki probably should've felt more disparaged about being loaded into that category. He would've if his heart wasn't attempting to exit the conversation without the rest of him.

"It was because he was Quirkless," Katsuki snapped out. It was simple. The answer was simple. There wasn't a need for this bullshit song and dance.

"No, it wasn't because he was Quirkless. Inko Midoriya never had an interest in Izuku's hobbies or dreams prior to his diagnosis," was the tart reply.

"What the fuck. She was like this beforehand? How the fuck do you know about that?" Katsuki took a far more aggressive step forward. "How the fuck do you know?" Tsukauchi's theory was bubbling to the surface.

“He told me. Not intentionally, I suppose he was technically asleep at the time, but he told me nonetheless and I’m… concerned.” How the hell was Deku sleep talking? Better not have been some bullshit Quirk All For One had stashed away from a rainy day just in case he had to interrogate a catatonic person. “Did Inko Midoriya know Izuku was coming home with injuries?” And the rug was ripped out from under him. Oh shit. That’s why he here. Shit.

“What?” He didn’t mean to stall, but how the hell did he reply to that without-

-“Did. She. Know?” No he fucking couldn’t stall. Didn’t take a genius to know what was gonna happen if the bastard didn’t get his answer. Inko Midoriya was a room away and if he really fucking wanted those answers he could go straight to the source and Katsuki wouldn’t have a hope in hell of even slowing him down. As it was, All For One appeared to be on the verge of getting to his feet and that was the last fucking thing Katsuki needed. So he went for it.

“Fucking probably!” Katsuki hissed and felt his stomach settle as All For One slid back down into his seat, then lurch abruptly again. “How the fuck could she not? We beat him black and fucking blue because we were fucking morons. Hell, even my hag of a mother constantly gave me shit for it and she rarely saw him. How the hell couldn’t she have known?” Panting, it was the only logical outcome to what Katsuki himself knew to be a fact. The first casualty of Mrs Midoriya’s problems had been Deku. “Maybe she was hoping we’d beat his fucking dream out of him, because in all those fucking years she saw, she cried and she said nothing to anyone. She did nothing to help him. We didn’t fucking get it either.”

“Your impeccable school records… only the case, because she did nothing,” All For One snarled and Katsuki nodded sharply. What was the point of hiding it? If All For One was paying early morning visits then he’d move through the masses until he found someone who had what he wanted.

“I’m not fucking proud of it. He was right. I was and still am a fucking moron and his mother didn’t do shit beyond giving him food and crying at him for being Quirkless. Deku didn’t fucking care that he was Quirkless after the shock. But every time he brought it up we fucking shot him down because we’re idiots. That was his mother, his teachers, me and all the dickheads we went to school with.” Katsuki crossed his arms. “There, are you happy?” That was basically everyone who ever met Deku now on the chopping block and Katsuki

couldn't bring himself to care. Deku never got any apologies before he died so why the hell should anyone else?

"Not particularly. This is worse than I thought, his mother is more Quirk than person," All For One muttered to himself.

"The hell does that mean?" Because that was a new one even to Katsuki. Usually people didn't separate Quirks from the person.

"Quirks influence personality. Inko Midoriya's Quirk is Attraction of Small objects and given that she's been crippling her son's attempts at long term independence from her for basically his entire life…"

The penny dropped, because All For One was all about Quirks and he wasn't here for Inko Midoriya. He was here about her Quirk, even if this shit was news to Katsuki. "The fuck. You think her Quirk sabotaged him so he'd stay with her?" Come to think it, Katsuki couldn't remember Inko Midoriya ever contributing ideas to any future plans for Deku. There was… nothing, not even a Plan B like most people had if being a pro hero didn't pan out. For most people, that plan didn't pan out and the Plan B was almost always a Plan A in reality.

"Yes. Even if she never noticed it herself." What really gave away All For One's years of supervillainy was how much malice he'd lovingly loaded into one word. "What kind of mother allows a four year old to watch the aftermath of a massacre on repeat? Where was her concern for any of the events that happened prior to UA? I haven't found any evidence of her ever taking action for any of the schoolyard bullying by teachers or students?" Another step forwards and Katsuki saw a small mountain of communications between the school and Inko Midoriya. Shit.

"He loves that debut video, you know," Katsuki instead said quietly, flicking his eyes away from the stack. "Made him want to help people in the first place." People like them who didn't deserve it.

"Izuku didn't need inspiration to make him do anything," was neatly returned with an irritable shake of the head. "He needed a parent to teach him how to navigate through life and deal with its undesirables and that never happened. He would've made it into the profession with or without society's approval if only he had that support."

Katsuki's mind screeched to a grinding halt. "Are you… are you saying you think he'd have been a pro hero anyway without a Quirk?" Inko Midoriya was screwed. Absolutely screwed. If All For One was saying

this…

“He always had a Quirk set aside for him, Katsuki Bakugou, even if none of us realised it at the time,” and there was the confirmation that he was a stalker. Tsukauchi needed a medal for raising that possibility. “Whether or not he had a Quirk shouldn’t have been a factor in his mother doing her one and only job. He was second in his class, capable of learning, implementing and applying all sorts of information and still she offered no support. There is no logical explanation for that or her allowing a toddler to watch a bloodbath.” Katsuki wasn’t going to agree with All For One aloud, but there was a point there and Katsuki wasn’t going to give him the satisfaction of agreeing with that point.

“You’re really caught up on that video, aren’t you?”

“That debut video was the aftermath All Might and myself beating each other senseless. I flattened the city to prevent him from following me. There were mountain of the dead and dying everywhere and by all accounts his mother wandered off and allowed him to watch it unsupervised. Unbelievable. For a woman who claims to have cared, she doesn’t seem to have made much effort to do any parenting.” Another flex of a giant hand.

As close as he was, Katsuki still couldn’t see All For One’s face, but he could hear each syllable growing shorter and shorter the more he read. “I don’t know why it pisses you off you so much.” Deku was Deku and Deku was nothing to All For One.

“You don’t have to understand why, you only have to understand that this isn’t out of any malice towards Izuku.” But that left plenty of room for malice towards every other dickhead who wasn’t Izuku. From a serial mass murderer who used Deku’s first name as regularly as any parent.

Katsuki didn’t respond, but he watched All For One page through those letters, every page more haphazard than the last. He could respond, but enough people were in the firing line without Katsuki adding anymore.

“Well, that’s as much as I can tolerate tonight.” Never had there been a truer word. “And finally, Katsuki Bakugou, I’ll uphold my part of the deal.” What a fucking miracle. All For One stood, the books he’d been reading were swept upwards and disappeared into his blazer and Katsuki instinctively stepped backwards.

“Yeah?” If there was anymore doubt infused in that word, All For One would’ve fucking disappeared from existence.

“Tomura Shigaraki’s real name is Tenko Shimura,” All For One waved a hand. “He’s the grandson of All Might’s mentor.”

Katsuki blinked and fucking stared as those two sentences rushed over him. “You’re a sick fuck.” Why the fuck would he even bother? All Might, as far as he knew, never even talked to any of these people. Yeah, maybe he cared, but in the end they were still strangers. Then again, it was All Might, he’d care on on principle.

“So I’ve been told,” the prick sighed. “It’s a work in progress.” Wait what? What the fuck? Since when was he trying to be less of a prick? “But that’s not the point. Tomura Shigaraki will be executed for his part in numerous murders prior to his involvement in the All Might attacks. Those murders also include that of his family.”

Katsuki opened his mouth. Closed it. Then opened it again. “Every time you open your fucking mouth, it gets fucking worse. What the fuck did you do to him?”

All For One shrugged. “I gave him the Quirk… and the rest he did on his own at the ripe old age of five.” All For One spoke uninterrupted and Katsuki’s jaw dropped as All For One spared no gory detail as to the downfall of the Shimura family and his contempt for all of them. First the dog, then the sister, and the mother… the deliberate targeting of his abusive piece of shit father… All while All for One watched the carnage from a distance and Shigaraki wearing their dismembered limbs for reasons… that even All For One couldn’t explain. All Might was going to flip his shit.

“Why the hell are you telling me this?” Frowning, Katsuki glared between All For One and Mrs Midoriya’s bedroom. It was too late to do anything about Shigaraki. All Might gave him loads of chances to make amends for Kamino and not once had he shown any signs of remorse. Even with this sad backstory bullshit, All Might caring after being through the interrogations was a slim chance.

“Tenko Shimura’s involvement was a mistake, but he’s no innocent victim in what happened. It was time wasted that I could’ve spent on… other investments.” Buyer’s remorse.

“You’re throwing that arsehole under the bus, because Deku’s better.” May as well cut the crap.

“Yes, basically,” came back unapologetically. “Izuku understands far more than Tomura ever did.” And that got Deku shortlisted for All For One’s favourite abductee list.

“You’re not gonna let him go.” Dull realisation was working its way through Katsuki. “You think he’ll get himself killed again.” He wanted a reason. He was here… because he must’ve been tempted to let Deku go and this was the opposing argument.

“If you were in my position, Katsuki Bakugou, would you let him go knowing he’s a risk to himself?” This wasn’t Kamino. There was nothing mocking in that sentence.

In spite of himself, Katsuki shook his head, because no, no one should be allowed out if they were that much of a danger to themselves. “But that’s not your decision to fucking make, is it? You’re nothing to him.” But if Deku’s parents were functionally out of the picture, who was left to make that decision?

“Unfortunately, Bakugou, as you well know from your own experiences, it becomes your decision when you’re the only one willing to act on the problem, whether you want it or not.” All For One clasped his hands and bowed ever so slightly, leaving Katsuki stumbling backwards at the sudden movement. “Thank you for your assistance.”

With a splatter of black goo, All For One was gone and Katsuki made the dash for Deku’s room.

Stepping back into Deku’s room, Katsuki noticed… an entire row of Deku’s Quirk journals and school records were missing.

“You fucking bastard.”

All For One had been missing in action for three days. The only thing that’d stopped Izuku from walking out the front door was the doctor’s reminder of Search phenomenally large range and so Izuku slunk back to a table and notebook.

There was an argument to be had that All For One was taking the news worse than Izuku was, even though what’d happened was entirely at his own hands. Not intentional in the damage it caused, but the flow on effects couldn’t be assigned to anyone else or explained away. For the first time in decades, the mask was beginning to crack

and splinter along its edges. All For One's protective cocoon had taken a blow from both his admission and Izuku's own discoveries. All For One might've used his Quirk as a shield from scrutiny for over a century, but right now that lie was hanging off the edge of a cliff by its fingertips. One strong breeze and even his history as Japan's preeminent monster wouldn't be enough to save him from the reality of his existence.

In Izuku's case, he'd been stalked by a shell of a person for effectively his entire life to make up for the death of another. In All For One's case, was it even really his life when his Quirk spent so much time setting the pace and tone with its every obsession? All For One the Quirk lived for Quirks as was its purpose… but All For One inside Izuku's head was far too rounded an individual to be merely a Quirk in comparison. Or… had All For One's creation of One For All left large enough a part of the original person instead that he was thrown out of balance with his own Quirk which became more dominant to fill the gap? All For One's complicity in his own actions were in question, whereas Izuku had… largely done everything in his life according to his own desires, where ever his stalker hadn't been involved and that made the difference.

At the end of it all, Izuku was a victim of crime and that was nothing new. In contrast, All For One had finally worked out that his one act of charity had turned him into a shadow of himself, resulting a part of his soul attempting to kill him for the past century. In this Olympic event of Who Had it Worse, All For One had not only taken out the gold medal, but massacred the prospects of every single other competitor by virtue of being half a person.

When looking at the big picture, All For One would logically have the worse response, because even his death hadn't been enough to quell the impulses of the Quirk. At least when Izuku had died he'd managed to uncover One For All's underlying machinations. When All For One had died his Quirk had attempted to carry on where it left off and… no. That didn't make sense.

No, that couldn't be the case. Had it really attempted anything after his death?… What had All For One even really done during his faked death apart from send out the Noumu and lay low? Missing criminals, a pro hero inexplicably missing a Quirk here and there, but it hadn't been enough to draw All Might's attention. Nothing compared to how he was beforehand. There was a huge reduction in the overall behaviour.

And then what? Izuku's hand that was scribbling out a flow chart came to a skidding halt. It didn't make any sense. If All For One's Quirk was calling the shots then why wasn't it still attempting to call the shots after All For One had been maimed? Surely with the person being in such a poor state it would've had an easier time with its influence… but that hadn't happened. It was, by all accounts, missing because All For One's impulsiveness was likewise missing in action.

All For One's Quirk wanted to be used. So why… what… what changed after All For One had been yanked back out from One For All and stuffed into his own body after the doctor had resurrected him? All For One had been avoiding conflicts and hiding his involvement until the deployment of Shigaraki as his scapegoat and… the Quirk had let him do it. Every single pro hero All For One had blown away left with their Quirk intact, apart from Ragdoll and in that case was a strategic reasoning to that beyond All For One wanting a new toy. It was out of character.

Izuku scratched the side of his head with a pen.

But why had the Quirk let it happen? For over a century it'd run rampant, dragging the person behind All For One through conflict after conflict without any sign of slowing down. Unless… Had All For One done something to shut the Quirk up? Was it possible that after his death All For One had found a way to hit the mute button after discovering that one flavour of his internal monologue wasn't quite like the others?

The Quirk had been too quiet… uninterested, when Izuku thought back to Kamino. All For One hadn't exhibited any of the drive for theft that Izuku would've expected from his own and All Might's descriptions. The conflict was with All Might the person, with no regard for any Quirks, so the Quirk itself couldn't have been driving All For One at that moment. So, if All For One had a way of turning off the voice of his Quirk while maintaining the Quirk's functionality… Why was he behaving as if the Quirk itself was still there in all of its glory?

Unless…

An awful smell then-

-"Izuku, what are you doing?" And Izuku jumped, turning to face All For One who'd arrived out of thin air, with the fading remnants of a familiar black liquid.

“Can you not do that?” There was an annoying squiggle over Izuku’s flowchart.

“My range with the Warp isn’t ideal. I have to be relatively close to the target,” and he could already warp to Izuku with ease even at Kamino. Then it clicked. They both had the same Quirk! The Warp the doctor had used to dump them in the forest was the same as what All For One had now!

“But wait… doesn’t the doctor have the same Quirk in one of the Noumu?” Two Quirks. Two. But Trigger mixed with blood could also duplicate Quirks so what was the next step to make it permanent?

“Duplication. Quirks are held as a static part of DNA. With enough effort you can derive a Quirk.” All For One smirked. “But without my Quirk the first step required towards that derivation may as well be impossible.” If it was possible with Trigger alone, then of course he could take it a step further with his Quirk.

Duplicate. Quirks. Izuku blinked. “And are the duplicates different to the original Quirks?” Why not have two of Kurogiri’s warp then? That didn’t have a limitation of needing a person as the target destination.

“Yes. They’re far more difficult to use. The instincts imprinted within the duplicates aren’t as strong as the original, meaning calling upon them and wielding them is more complex. Warp Gate did have a derivation made, but it was impossible to use without the instincts of the original Quirk.” That made sense. Warp Gate needed coordinates and ripping holes through space and time was a decidedly more complicated affair. Which made Izuku wonder…

“And your Quirk?” Instincts were weaker… “Would it be the same?” Right question, because All For One was already reaching out a hand to lean on Izuku.

“In the same category as Warp Gate, but due to the strain it places on the body.” All For One gestured to his hair. “I wasn’t born with white hair, Izuku. The weird and wonderful colours we see now are a result of numerous mutations and vestigial Quirk features manifesting across generations of those with Quirks.”

Izuku wasn’t buying it. “That wasn’t what I asked.” If the instincts of duplicates were weaker… had All For One not been using his original Quirk after his death? “Why weren’t you having problems at Kamino with your Quirk misbehaving? You didn’t try to take any of the Quirks from the pro heroes. Was that a duplicate?” Izuku had an image made

by One For All. All For One had his original Quirk and what had to be a derivative. That made three so far, but one was an accident, one was the original and the duplicate couldn't have been the only one made if All For One was such a temperamental Quirk.

"Yes, at Kamino. Afterwards I retrieved the original to save you," was the simple response with a second hand coming in to rest on Izuku's shoulder. "With Quirks come their instincts and I needed its full range to best keep you alive. Every tool in the arsenal, so to speak." And every psychotic impulse that came with that arsenal. All For One who'd subjected himself to his worst part of himself to save Izuku.

"You idiot," Izuku groaned, because this could've been avoided. All For One's entire conflict with his broken Quirk could've been avoided! "You were free! Why? Why didn't you just let me-"

"-Stay dead? That was never an option, Izuku, with or without my Quirk."

"What does that mean?" Of course it was an option! Raising the dead wasn't normal for anyone! There was no guarantee Izuku wasn't going to be a braindead vegetable after that long without oxygen or a beating heart.

"My original Quirk is what prevented me from taking you in the first place, you know," and All for One's resting hands became an embrace. "After all, you didn't have a Quirk and it wasn't interested. But without it? Tomura wouldn't have been a factor I would have considered." All For One snuggled down further into Izuku's hair. "You're perfect. What more could I want?"

Izuku froze as it crept up on him. After Kamino it'd been retrieved. That was the entire period of Izuku's recovery. "Is that you or your Quirk talking?"

"Funny you should mention that, Izuku. You said it yourself. All For One as a Quirk is all about the acquisition and using of Quirks, but that distinction doesn't feel as strong as it once did." The hairs on the back of Izuku's neck inexplicably stood up. "I… personally preferred collecting people to collecting Quirks," and Izuku's intuition shrieked into his ear as All For One leaned in once more. Serene, unbothered and then it happened. "Now though, the argument is irrelevant. I think, in hindsight, that without my Quirk's meddling that if I'd taken you instead of Shigaraki that it'd have been the preferable outcome for both of us. I could've taken care of you, unlike your parents, and

you could've had and been anything you wanted." *So long as you stayed*, was whispered by One For All.

The Quirk. It had to be the Quirk.

Missing for three days… and clearly he'd been making use of them, because whatever he'd found out had validated an opinion he'd already been nursing. All For One's rational side had already been questioning Izuku's childhood and now... now there was more ammunition for the primitive part of All For One's brain that wanted to hold on and not let go.

All For One was never going to let him leave, because the person and Quirk, after a century of bickering, had finally found common ground after months of the person enforcing his desires onto the Quirk. The person Izuku could reason with, but pulling himself free from the tentacles of the Quirk was another problem entirely. Izuku had to find the person and do it fast.

Chapter End Notes

Merry (late) Christmas and Happy New Year~

Distance

Chapter Summary

> The state or fact of being apart in space, as of one thing from another; remoteness.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Having Katsuki Bakugou fall in through his front door was nothing new. Having Katsuki Bakugou fall in through his front door after a witching hour chat with All For One was another thing entirely.

“Are you alright?” Toshinori led young Bakugou through a house filled with marked boxes from the police station. He made a mental note to move them out of the walkways before any visitors died and their families started legal action.

“Toshi, the hell is he doing here?” Gran barked from a spot at the kitchen table, his ramen cup dangerously close to overflowing.

“Unplanned visit from All For One,” Bakugou dully replied, staring straight ahead. “It was fucked.” Eloquent and to the point as always. Toshinori would’ve personally gone with “shit” as a nice, single word catchall, but young Bakugou hadn’t been posing as a police officer for months that were stretching into a blank void that didn’t have young Midoriya in it.

“How the hell are you still alive?” Gran mouthed around the noodles as Bakugou fell into the seat opposite him.

“I think I accidentally told him everything he wanted to fucking hear,” he groaned and held his head in his hands. That was… concerning, because there was never any certainty about what All For One wanted to hear in relation to any topic. He was completely insane, like any other person whose life aspirations revolved around being a supervillain.

“I’ll put the kettle on.” The old police station fallback. When in doubt, bring out the tea, coffee and cake and it’d lubricate up a conveyor belt of daily horrors from Japan’s finest. Well, not quite the country’s finest, but it was a work in progress. Before Toshinori left, they’d hopefully be Japan’s finest.

They were through three cups before young Bakugou finished his recollection. “He hates Inko Midoriya. Blames her for Deku getting himself injured and shit and him taking the blow for me at Kamino.” Young Bakugou’s head was bowed. “Shigaraki was a scapegoat for you All Might. Moment he had Deku, he ditched Shitfingers and ran. I don’t know what to fucking think about what he said, but it’s fucked.”

From dead air permeating Toshinori’s kitchen, he was fairly sure that applied to everyone as a collective state of being. Gran had finished off his noodles and was staring a distant point on the wall and Toshinori himself had to wilfully close his jaw. “But why blame the parents? Why would he care enough to expose himself for that purpose?” There still wasn’t anything entirely discounting that it was an attempted grab at One For All either.

“Data collection. Deku doesn’t…” The boy shifted uncomfortably. “Doesn’t have a lot of close friends. Didn’t really confide in anyone and no one really knew anything about him. If he didn’t ask me, he’d have had to ask Mrs Midoriya directly.” And subsequently risked a reprisal from young Midoriya in question. “Deku will lose his shit anyway, but All For One asking Mrs Midoriya directly…” From Bakugou’s recollection, it may very well have resulted in the woman’s death. How to blame she was for the perceived flaws was up for discussion, but All For One had already found his scapegoat. It was a matter of when, not if and when All For One was already making late night house calls… Toshinori shuddered. Inko Midoriya couldn’t stay in her apartment anymore. Not when All For One was at home enough there to abscond with young Midoriya’s treasured possessions.

“We’re going to have to move Mrs Midoriya to a more secure location, before All For One gets any ideas about… impromptu parenting.” Just the thought of what he’d said made Toshinori go a shade of green. All For One intervening because he didn’t think young Midoriya’s parents were up to the task. Young Midoriya’s parents who were now exposed in the same way Nana Shimura had been exposed and here the mass murderer was claiming the moral high ground. Even if young Midoriya made it out, would All For One leave anyone to return to if he thought the parents were a threat? In Toshinori’s experience, the answer was a resounding no. All For One would wrap his rotting branches around his victims and squeeze the life out of them and young Midoriya wasn’t going to be any different. As much as Toshinori wanted to think otherwise, he’d seen the end result of a gradual grind by All For One and he didn’t want to see the end result on young Midoriya. They had to find him and do it soon.

“Figured as much. What about Shigaraki?” If he was anyone else, Bakugou would’ve been biting a lip. Instead he was bouncing a ball off of Toshinori’s kitchen wall, risking an early morning noise complaint. Not that he had the heart to tell him to stop. All For One making an impromptu early morning visit was stressful for even the most prepared person.

With Shigaraki though, Toshinori didn’t think he’d cared less about a piece of news in his entire life. Maybe before All For One had killed young Midoriya, but now that Shigaraki’s actions had directly contributed to it? No. Not even being related to Nana was enough to absolve him of that sin. “And? There’s not much we can do for Shigaraki at this point. He made his choices and All For One can’t be blamed for everything, unless we discover some form of mind control or brainwashing.”

“You… don’t care?” Young Bakugou was frowning. Toshinori didn’t blame him for frowning. Maybe in another life where young Midoriya hadn’t died Toshinori might’ve felt more… anything… towards the revelation. But now? Now there was a nearly cheerful absence of any and all concern. Tomura Shigaraki was no longer an innocent victim and hadn’t been since he’d willingly ended his father’s life. Shigaraki couldn’t care less about the lives lost in Kamino because of his own actions. Whatever hardships he’d experienced as a child did not excuse what he was now. Young Midoriya had been trapped with All For One for months while in a vulnerable state, and, according to Shinsou was still tearing strips off the fiend. Even death hadn’t stopped young Midoriya from giving All For One what for and Shigaraki’s excuses were pathetic at best.

“Tenko Shimura chose his path in life the moment he wiped out his family,” Gran Torino grunted around a bowl of the cheapest instant ramen Toshinori could find. “Nana would’ve been rolling in her grave. Her son, a child beating piece of filth. Her daughter-in-law, a woman stupid enough to marry that piece of filth and procreate. An elder sister that threw her brother under the bus even though she knew he was in for a beating, and two grandparents who watched on and did nothing.” Gran slurped his noodles down with gusto. “Can’t say I’m surprised that All For One had absolutely no remorse. Most kids with a rogue Quirk who killed the family dog would’ve stopped there, but he kept going until there was nothing left. There’s a sign if there was ever one.” Largely because it was so rare. An accidental death wasn’t unheard of and special measures were taken for those children, but to keep killing after the fact? There had to be more to the story, but unless it was straight up mind control, nothing was going to save

Shigaraki from his day in court. The court system didn't care about excuses.

"I never thought I'd see the day where I agreed with All For One on anything, but this behaviour is…" Toshinori trailed off. Unnatural didn't even begin to cover the events that'd occurred in the Shimura household. "Not normal doesn't begin to even cover what you were told by All For One. Even if what he said only has a grain of truth, most children wouldn't be capable of such a feat even the most unstable of Quirks." Nor going on to kill so many other people after the fact. The average person would stop because their empathy would eventually catch up with them, but it was over a decade and there still wasn't a sign that Shigaraki had the slightest lick of remorse over all the people he'd killed.

"Nana was nothing like what you've described of her son and his family," Gran added. "To think that that ungrateful snot blamed her for what All For One did…" There was a clenching of the old man's fist. "Providing he isn't a lying bastard, of course, but we've still got access to Shigaraki to make a verification." Unfortunately, Shigaraki being an emotionally devoid manchild only supported All For One statements instead of disproving them.

"Yeah, I thought that didn't make sense either, but that bastard didn't sound like he was making shit up for fun. He was dead serious the whole time." Young Bakugou grimaced, gulping down his still scalding coffee. "That's part of why I came here instead of calling the cops. He wasn't at the apartment to pick a fight. He was at the apartment to work out why the fuck Deku took a building to the face for total strangers. Telling me about Shigaraki was his idea of a thank you before he pissed off. Fucking creep." Katsuki Bakugou might've sounded relaxed to the casual observer, but there was absolutely no hiding the fact that he was trembling.

"He's getting worse with age," Toshinori nodded. "He was impulsive beforehand, but this isn't like him." There wasn't a person alive who could claim they knew All For One well, but there was a twist in his gut that made him think he was on the money.

"That's not fucking all either. That bastard raided Deku's room. Half of his Quirk journals and school records are missing." That got Toshinori's attention, because young Midoriya did have exhaustive lists on the Quirks of the various people he observed and All For One should have no need of those lists.

“Vlad King was collecting similar records as well,” Gran grunted. Information. All For One had cast a trawler net in the ocean and was fishing for deadly game, but why? Why bother in the first place when he’d spent the last century without anyone like young Midoriya and seemed to persist without any issues?

“I think…” Young Bakugou was clearly struggling, his fists were flexing. “I don’t think that arsehole is going to give Deku back.” He paused. “And it’s not because of fucking One For All either. It’s more like he was after Deku in the first place and One For All just got in the way.”

“I really hope that isn’t the case. We have absolutely no information on All For One when he isn’t hunting for Quirks and if found another reason to keep a One For All holder that doesn’t involve the Quirk…” Who was All For One without his Quirk? No one before them had ever had to ask the question.

“We’re going in blind,” young Bakugou grimaced. “Fucking great. We need to find the bastard.” He paused then breathed out a puff of air. “And do something about Shitfingers, probably and we can see if that dickhead was telling the truth or his version of it.”

Toshinori shifted awkwardly in his seat.

“Oh, don’t you worry about Tenko Shimura, Toshi. You’ve got enough on your plate. Let me handle this one,” Gran cracked his knuckles. “I think Nana’s grandson needs a wakeup call, because what if he doesn’t know that his Quirk was All For One’s idea?”

What don’t All For One’s victims know? Huh, there’s an idea…

Touya Todoroki sneered at his younger brother. His younger brother slowly blinked back over a steaming cup of hot chocolate and a notebook that was being carefully positioned on the table. With the restraints and shielding between them, Touya had no real prospects of slinging more than words at the brat. Shame.

“Hi.” There was a small wave and Touya gaped back at him.

“What the hell do you mean?” Touya snapped back, fidgeting against his restraints. “That’s all you say to your big brother after not seeing him for years?” Perfect, precious Shouto, daddy’s favourite. Not even happy to see that his brother was still alive.

“You tried to kill my classmates at the school camp,” Shouto answered without affect. “Should I be happy that you’re still alive? I’ve got nothing really to say to you. I’m here because the rest of the family asked me to visit.” Not change of expression. No emotiveness. Just like a fucking doll being pulled along by its strings. Absolutely worthless without the grand puppet-master leading it along. Where was Endeavor these days? Crying outside the door while his dolly went in and did his dirty work?

“You can’t even react like a normal person,” he hissed, flames being smothered by the suppression system as he tried to call on them. “Daddy’s pet project-”

“-Doesn’t care about serial killers with daddy issues. No one in the family asked to be related to you.” The air left Touya’s lungs in a snap, Shouto’s frosty, indifferent tones chilled the room. What the hell did he just say? “We mean absolutely nothing to you, as you’ve already told Detective Yagi. You never came back home or told anyone that you were alive. You attacked me. You’ve killed countless other people before you even got to the school camp and were already on the lists of various villain fixers as muscle. You did this, not me, not the old man, not Natsuo, mum or Fuyumi. You. You made these choices. I’m not going to waste my time caring about a loser who thinks he needs his old man’s approval to be successful in life.” Shouto sipped at his chocolate.

“What the hell is your problem? Why are you here if you don’t care?” No, this wasn’t right. Wasn’t… weren’t his family meant to care? Why wasn’t Shouto reacting? Where was Endeavor?

Lowering the hot chocolate and flipping open the book, Shouto continued without so much as glancing up at Touya. “Fuyumi says she hopes you’re not hurting yourself. Natuso hopes you’ve learned how to talk to other people about your problems. Mum and the old man don’t know what to say, because the last time they saw you, you were dead. And I don’t have anything to add really.” The book slapped shut. “That’s it really.”

Gasping for air, Touya wrenched against his bonds. “That’s it. You find out I’m still alive and that’s all you have to say?” He could ignite, but the suppression system would rip the oxygen from his lungs and suffocate him. That prick Yagi wasn’t playing around with security for his staff. “Don’t you feel anything? You know what he did! What he did to me!” Touya screamed across the gap.

Shouto slowly blinked. “Did he hit you?”

“No.”

“Did he force you to use your Quirk?”

“No.”

“Did he force you to be a hero?”

“No!”

“Then what did he do that it was so bad it that you had to go off and kill twenty people? No one else in the family is a murderer.”

Touya felt a remaining thread inside him snap.

“HE MADE ME!” Touya shrieked across the gap. “HE MADE ME WHAT I AM! ALL I HAD WAS WHAT HE GAVE ME!”

And Shouto. Fucking. Snorted. At. Him. Looking at both of his hands, Shouto rolled his eyes.

“WHY ARE YOU ROLLING YOUR EYES?” Why… Why didn’t any of them care? They were… they were meant to… What did they know that he didn’t?

Setting his hot chocolate down, Shouto inched forwards to peer at Touya without any expression. “Are you sure it all came from the old man? The police only ever found fragments of you. Do you even remember how you got here? How do any of us know you’re not some kind construct instead of the real deal? We found a guy who was reanimating corpses recently, how do we know you aren’t one of them? No one saw you die.”

Shouto could’ve kicked Touya in the stomach and he wouldn’t have been so breathless. They thought… he wasn’t real. None of them were taking him seriously because they didn’t think he was real. None of them thought he was the real Touya Todoroki. Endeavor wasn’t here because Endeavor didn’t think that it was his son. As far as they were concerned, they were talking to Touya Todoroki’s ghost.

“Of course I’m real! I’m your brother!” Why… why the hell didn’t Shouto believe him? Was the entire family crazy? Of course he was Touya. “I didn’t die!”

“Great, then you remember the guy who faked your death? You

remember what he looked like when you woke up and set him on fire for kidnapping you?" Leaning forwards, his chin resting on his hands. "Because if you don't know how you got here, then why should any of us believe that you're the real deal and not an imposter made to destroy the family's reputation? Wouldn't be the craziest plan ever."

Then Touya froze. "I didn't die." Wouldn't he have remembered waking back up, if not dying?

"Are you sure about that? Pathology said the burnt bone fragments were yours and that included a chunk of your skull. If you didn't die, then why don't you remember who supposedly saved you?" Shouto was again perusing the notebook. "We never tested the ashes we got back from the funeral home. I guess someone could've swapped in some dummy ashes and we'd never have noticed the difference without forensics. There's an idea…" There was a note made on the page.

"You're lying." This had to be part of some plot to deny what Endeavor had done to Touya. This had to be Endeavor's plan.

"I don't need to lie. We just found out that All For One's been reanimating corpses and making puppets out of them. You might be one of them," Shouto blinked again and Touya watched it happen in slow motion. No. "You know, the guy who backs the League of Villains? I don't think the real Touya would be dumb enough to take up a job with the guy who murdered him and reanimated his corpse as a sock puppet. What do you think, Dabi? Are you dumber than my big brother?"

Touya Todoroki stared straight ahead, the words turning to ash on his lips. *But I am your big brother!*

"Nothing to say? That's fine, you weren't good company anyway." Rising to his feet, his eyes never so much as flinching towards Touya. "That's me done if you don't remember what happened and have nothing else to say."

There was a noise, maybe it came from Touya, maybe it didn't, because the moment he fell silent it was as though he'd ceased to exist.

A hand rested on the door. "By the way, Dabi, I wasn't here because the family asked me to be here." Touya could only stare, wordlessly as his younger brother was halfway out the door. "I'm here because I wanted to see if the same bastard who messed with Midoriya's corpse

was the same one who made you and now I have my answer. Thanks, I guess? It was illuminating to know what exactly happened to my dead brother's corpse. Enjoy prison." Without so much as a glance over his shoulder, Shouto Todoroki was gone.

"What. The. Fuck. I'm not a corpse! I'm your brother!" He yelled into what had to be the void, because there wasn't any answer. And maybe, there wasn't going to an answer, because if Shouto was in here thinking he was talking to an imposter… then Endeavor and the police must've held the same view.

Meaning… Endeavor wasn't coming. No one was coming and all Touya could do was howl into the void.

"I'M REAL. WHY WON'T YOU LOOK AT ME!?"

Only his echo answered him.

Whether that really was Touya or not, he was ever bit as warped as Detective Yagi and the other police had indicated to him when they'd asked for help. A grudge against the family for… reasons that none of them could quite work out. If he was against Endeavor, then why didn't he see Shouto as a victim of the old man's plans? If he was against the family more generally, why sit there and wait for so long without doing anything? Nothing about the interactions Shouto experienced had suggested there was any genuine interest in what anyone in the family thought of Touya. It was almost like dealing with a faint echo, a doppelgänger who didn't realise that they weren't the original, carrying out what it did on a blind impetus. In the end he was just another serial killer wanting the sympathy vote and Shouto had what he needed from Dabi.

No one else in the family was an accomplished serial killer and they all had a childhood that'd count as a tragic backstory. Midoriya was trapped with All For One for months and was still fighting the good fight without taking it out on other people. "Touya" could blame his parents, siblings and society as much as he liked, it didn't mean that any of them had to care about it. Sympathy had its limits and it tended to end where mass murderer and the attempted murder of children began. The old man was torn up by it, but from Yagi's description, Shouto couldn't bring himself to care after knowing what was happening to Midoriya.

"He said something about you being a favourite and a Quirk Marriage,

blah blah blah," Yagi had rolled his eyes with an enviable level of ambient contempt. "That's not what we care about. Endeavor could've used baby him as a football in several World Cups and been on national television and it wouldn't change the fact that there's something off about this Touya Todoroki. None of what he's done makes sense, when Endeavor's reputation abrasive at best for years. No one in the public actually cares about your reputation." Endeavor had glowered at that, but it wasn't like Yagi was wrong. "We think this is connected to All For One's bodysnatching hobby." After the investigation into Midoriya's disappearance, that didn't come as a shock.

"So you want me to do what?" Shouto had asked.

"Be you. Go in there and ask him if he remembers what happened. If he doesn't, we've got more proof that All For One had a few practice runs before he absconded with Midoriya. We can trace whoever signed the release for his body and whoever did the pathology for the coroner." It was so simple. But if All For One had risen Midoriya from the dead and did so successfully, then it had to happen to other people first for the method to be tested. The only other dead, but alive person they had access to was Dabi and if Dabi gave weight to those suspicions…

And here they were, in the aftermath. "That was surprisingly easy," Shouto nodded to Yagi and his father once he was on the other side of the glass.

"I can't see how that's Touya," Endeavor murmured, his eyes never leaving the glass. "But if it helps you find Midoriya, we'll do whatever you request." Neither of them could look at Dabi, still raving into the abyss with the observation room muted, and see a relative staring back. This had All For One written all over it.

There must've been blood in the lettering though, because Yagi was the toothy shark that scented it. Yagi's blue eyes blazed in the shadows of his face as his rictus grin inched higher upwards. "Excellent, so Touya Todoroki's remains were meddled with at the morgue then for the the results to come back as they did. Upstairs will be making inquiries on my behalf." Not for a second did Shouto feel a shred of sympathy towards anyone on the receiving end of those questions. "Thanks, Todorokis, another link to All For One's elusive medical expert."

Endeavor jerked his head in what might've been a nod and Shouto

found himself shrugging. “You’re welcome.”

“Now if you’ll excuse me, I need to have a personal conversation with Kan over here to see if his ruminations about his life choices have gone anywhere productive for policing. Good work, Todorokis.” Yagi hurled open the door and marched from the room. A minute later, a distant and familiar wail reverberated through the walls with both Shouto and Endeavor refusing to make eye contact as Dabi jumped at the sound.

Dabi hadn’t really given them any hope that Touya was still alive, but it did give them a paper trail that’d lead straight back to All For One’s minion who was stealing corpses and All For One himself. Find All For One, find Midoriya. Maybe Shouto would go back in and thank Dabi once Midoriya was back.

“He’s in jail,” Neito repeated as the weight of Ida’s statement placed a delicate 4 gs on his shoulders and his legs buckled. Vlad King in jail. “What happened at the memorial?” Bakugou had long since Midoriya’s death treated 1-B’s teacher with nothing short of derision, but to be responsible for the camp attack? “I knew it was a distraction, but they actually caught him?” Vlad King caught in the middle of a criminal act. 1-B’s homeroom teacher caught in the middle of a criminal act. Their teacher in jail, resulting in a rotating cast of guest teachers who were covering the role. Not that Neito would’ve thought that Endeavor of all people would’ve had it in him for teaching children (nor his overworked sidekicks), but there was an eye for detail in the agency that strangely reminded him of Midoriya. If Endeavor ever retired, it might be on the cards as a full time job. Even if Endeavor verbally flayed them for the damage done to property and themselves, his heart was clearly in the right place. Not that any of them would've pegged him for caring.

Across from him, Ida was adjusting his glasses. “Correct. Bakugou, Todoroki and Aizawa apprehended him after he was caught accessing records relating to Izuku Midoriya. Understandably, why he felt the need to meddle with the records of a dead person at the time will be a source of intense discussion with the police.” Those questions would be a drop in the ocean, because how many other students had suffered mysterious accidents after their records were accessed?

“And the attack at the camp?” Neito slowly lowered himself into a chair that Ida had pulled out for him.

“Vlad King is suspected of being the mole who leaked the location, according to Bakugou.” Ida’s glasses glinted. “There hasn’t been formal confirmation, but the lead investigator is certain that Vlad King was the source providing information to the League of Villains about All Might’s attendance at the USJ. Likewise, he was one of only a handful who knew specific details about the camp’s location and events.” Which de facto made him a leading suspect and after stealing information from Midoriya’s records? He had to be the only suspect at this point.

Then Neito frowned, because... wasn't that confidential? Even the media wasn't reporting on the news. “How does Bakugou know so much about what’s going on?”

“He’s friends with the lead investigator,” Ida sighed.

Ah, of course. “Yes, that’ll do it. I should tell the rest of the class then that our homeroom teacher is…”

Responsible for Midoriya’s death.

1-B were not going to take this news well.

Chapter End Notes

> Another year, another April Fools Day and another chapter posted on it. I hope everyone is also having a happy Easter. I wish I was, but after breaking teeth a couple of weeks ago, my wallet is still intensely crying and chocolate is firmly off the menu. Any typos will be fixed in due course.

Negotiate

Chapter Summary

This for that.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Tomura stared. “Who the fuck are you?” His first visitor since he’d finally escaped that bastard Yagi was All Might’s associate from Kamino. Being back in Tartarus was a holiday compared to being forced to respawn in that trash filled boss room. No crushing pressure, no inability to breathe, no one around who gave the slightest shit about Tomura provided he stayed still and didn’t cause too much trouble. Being a nobody in this place was a pro, not a con and the less Tomura had to do with any of the wardens, the less likely it’d be for them to invite Tomura back in to assist Yagi with his enquiries. The more he was beneath notice, the more likely he’d never again have to set eyes on Toshinori Yagi. That plague on villainy who eclipsed All Might himself.

Toshinori Yagi. One of the few animated corpses not created at Sensei’s hands, but was still every bit as vicious as any one of the man’s creations. Out of all of the questionable actions Sensei had taken over the years, having Yagi slip through the cracks was the worst. A bubble of weirdness followed that prick around, like the laws of natural reality ceased to be when Yagi entered the room and they’d missed him entirely. Was *this* who was responsible for catching Sensei the first time around? Not All Might, but his right hand man. How had they missed it?

The hobbled old man snorted derisively in the face of Tomura’s silence and reclined in his chair. “Your only hope of leaving this pit alive, Tenko Shimura. Gran Torino’s the name, I used to work with your grandmother.” Shimura… No, Tomura didn’t want to hear that name. It was almost as bad as hearing Yagi’s name.

Tenko… Shimura… Tomura fidgeted in his restraints, his face itched. “That’s not my name.” It wasn’t.

“Oh? That’s not what All For One told us. He candidly told that brat Bakugou that he set up the Shimura family for failure. That you are all

that remains after years of sustained abuse from your father. That you snapped and killed all of them in a fit of Quirk assisted rage." The old man grimaced. "You know, we'd all suspected that he was involved, but Nana forbade us from contact. She had the misguided view that All For One would leave her family alone after he'd killed her, but All For One was never one for acts of human decency. There's not enough human in him for it." It was a low blow. Sensei was still human, even if he didn't follow the same rules as the rest of society.

Tomura thrashed, feeling the restraints cut in. "I don't believe you. You heroes are all the same, liars and making excuses." *Because you don't think we're worth saving*, was unspoken.

"Considering what you're in here for, kid, pleases and thank yous will go a long way," the gnome snorted. "But didn't it ever occur to you that All For One is the closest Quirk user you'll get to having omniscience? All Might only knows what he knows, there's nothing in his Quirk that can spy on people halfway across the country." Drumming his fingers on the arm of his chair, there was a shrug. "Midoriya told us about your little chat with him, you know. How unprompted you were in going straight to All Might as the source of all of your woes, but that's yet another sign of All For One's meddling. All Might can't do what you expect, but All For One's been more than capable of it for decades." No no no. He wasn't listening to this, no. Another wrench against his restraints had them cutting into his flesh.

"I don't even want you here," Tomura snapped back. "All of this… it means nothing to me. Not you. Nothing." Nothing the geriatric said would help Tomura, in or out of the prison. "Nothing you say changes anything." Not for him at least.

"You know," Gran Torino continued in a conspiratorial whisper, "Dabi's family refused to even visit him. Said they weren't going to waste time on an experiment posing as their dead brother. I can't help but wonder if there's more than a little conventional wisdom in that statement." Tomura didn't know what the hell was going on with Dabi, or why his family (really? He had one?) would think experimentation of any kind was involved, but he wasn't an idiot. If Dabi had been left to rot by his own family, then Tomura shouldn't squander a stranger's… whatever the hell this was meant to be. A friendly interrogation?

"What do you want?" Tomura sunk down as far as he could into his restraints. Yagi used so much stick that Tomura would have the scarring for the rest of his life, but he knew carrot when it was being

dangled in front of him.

“Not much, really. It’s a fairly small thing.” It was never small with these people.

“But it’s something only I can do?” Tomura sneered back.

“Well, yeah, you’re the only other kid we know of who had any immediate contact with All For One,” the midget was nodding animatedly. “Well, the only other one who’s still alive enough to talk about it.”

Wait… “Other kid…? What other kid?” Tomura hadn’t met any other kids while with Kurogiri.

“Midoriya, of course. Yagi wasn’t exaggerating for your benefit, Shigaraki. All For One really did drop the entire League of Villains like a bag of dirt as soon as Midoriya was slammed by that building in Kamino.” Tomura slowly blinked. It couldn’t be… Sensei had to have more self restraint than running off in the middle of what should’ve been the last conflict with All Might.

“How do you know?”

“I was there, if you don’t remember,” came the blunt reply. “We all saw him get the hell out of there, but we didn’t know why until Bakugou saw him dragging what was left of Midoriya out of the rubble. Poor kid was already gone by the time All For One got to him.” Stealing bodies wasn’t anything new for Sensei, but leaving instance in a fight with All Might to go do it? That was new. “Look, I’ll level you with you. All For One never gave two shits about you and that’s par for the course as far as his using, parasitic behaviour’s concerned. He takes and takes and takes and if there’s the slightest hint of subversion he kills you.” There was a shrug. “He’s got years of being the biggest bastard in Japan and arguably the world, so what we don’t get is why he’s different with Midoriya.” They weren’t alone in that either. Even Tomura couldn’t think of why Sensei would treat Midoriya differently. “One of Midoriya’s schoolmates saw it for himself. All For One wrapped around Midoriya like a blanket. What we don’t understand is the *why*.”

Tomura opened his mouth. Then closed it and opened it again. What the fuck? Since when had Sensei done that with anyone? A hug if they were lucky, but prolonged contact may as well have been holy water for how quickly Sensei recoiled.

Breathe in. Breathe out. “I… I don’t fucking know,” Tomura admitted. “Sensei was never that touchy feely around me. Or anyone else. He was never around enough to do it.” Distant. The man was distant at best. “I don’t understand what you want from me.” None of what Tomura said would have any impact on Midoriya’s situation. If Sensei had him then it was already too late.

“We want you to help us save Midoriya before All For One does to him what he did to you.”

A beat. Maybe two. Sensei leaving him in the rubble. Sensei vanishing. Sensei never fully answering his questions. Sensei’s cold, stony silence after he spoke to Midoriya at that shopping mall. Sensei’s lack of interest and distraction the moment they’d returned from UA the first time… Sensei drifting further and further away, as the years went by, always gazing elsewhere…

“You know that it’s a waste of time, right?” It was too late.

“Since when has that ever stopped us from trying?” Gran Torino dramatically waved his hand. “I mean, the wardens told me that you’d be in here forever, but I said I’d try anyway. We might not all have the rescue success rate of All Might, but we’re not going to leave *anyone* in the hands of All For One. Not even you, you ungrateful twerp. Even if it’s purely out of spite, we need everything we can get on the bastard.”

Spite… huh… Yeah, Tomura could do spite. It was Sensei's own fault for taking so long. “Everything, you can get, huh? You know about his doctor, then?” Tomura grinned with every single tooth fully exposed.

“Oooh, do tell!” Gran Torino leaned forwards. “I’ll see if I can get you a cup of tea, considering the topic.”

It wasn’t much, but it was a start. At least it wasn’t Yagi. At least this time Tomura would be allowed to drink the cup of tea.

Sensei was staring again. Not that Midoriya had noticed. Or perhaps, Midoriya hadn’t wanted to notice. There was always a level of uncertainty around Midoriya. Decidedly deliberate in the way he was resolutely writing away in his notepad, even with Sensei hovering within arm’s reach. Midoriya wasn’t sneaking glances over his shoulder or observably uncomfortably and was refusing to give the man the slightest amount of attention. Impossible for the average person given Sensei’s reputation, but Midoriya’s focus was unbroken

in the most generous of terms and entirely indifferent to all outside influence in less generous terms. The boy simply didn't care in any capacity that Sensei was present. Even now it was unthinkable to the doctor. Both for the boy to do it and Sensei to tolerate the behaviour.

If it was anyone else they'd be dead or Quirkless. But Izuku Midoriya wasn't anyone else and Sensei's fixation with the boy, especially now, eclipsed every other scheme by orders of magnitude. The doctor's work wasn't quite worthless, but it was old hat compared to Midoriya's mirroring of Sensei's own skillset. An equal or perhaps superior in conceptualisation and execution, Sensei had described. All that held Midoriya back was a lack of experience and Sensei certainly wasn't at all bothered by the possibility that he was engineering the tool of his own demise. Tomura Shigaraki was at best a toy compared to Sensei falling over himself for a chance to so much as touch the most recent masterpiece.

Sensei wasn't so much gazing into the abyss, so much as he was lovingly leaning into an embrace that could reduce him to pulp at any moment and did so gleefully. Maybe for others the abyss gazed back, but in the case of Sensei it was valiantly avoiding all attempts at eye contact, even with the man himself so desperate to attract even a sliver of attention. The abyss didn't gaze back, because Sensei was beneath its notice and contempt. It had to have stung.

For perhaps the first time in his life, Sensei had no bargaining chip. No potential offer, no Quirk, no threats, no points to score in a game of mutual benefit or compromise. Sensei was no power player at this exclusive table of one. There was no Quirk he could offer to his functional equivalent that Midoriya couldn't claim himself. No long term emotional attachment in the case of Shigaraki, as much as Sensei had flung himself at Midoriya, as though Midoriya was the last door floating away from the sinking Titanic. There was no professional crossover either and it wasn't because Sensei was a criminal and Midoriya law enforcement. No no no, it was because Sensei didn't meet Midoriya's standards when it came to the class of criminal matching up with the Quirk. In peer review, Sensei simply wasn't good enough professionally to warrant any respect or consideration. There was absolutely nothing Sensei had in his arsenal that could be used to compel the boy and both of them knew it.

Sensei was exposed. Professionally, emotionally, physically and everything between. This was the one object of his desire that he couldn't steal and hide away, when said object was more tactical nuclear warhead in nature than it was a person. Never before had

Sensei dealt with a person where scorched earth was not only a tool, but the preferred tool. Midoriya would rather burn up and take everyone with him than make concessions. There was no option for force, when the retaliation that followed would assure Sensei's demise and, with the boy's previous history, the doctor's own as a means of crippling Sensei once more should Sensei himself cheat death. Midoriya was playing with a fully stacked deck and Sensei was utterly helpless in his inevitable march towards a more permanent death.

"What do you want?" That Sensei even had to ask was telling on its own. Normally people were chasing rumours and throwing themselves at *him*, but all Midoriya had done since he'd arrived was lash out verbally and physically. And by all accounts, survive his own impertinence.

"Hm?" There wasn't even a pause in his pen stroke. He wasn't even paying attention, was he?

"What do you want?" Sensei moved to stand in front of him.

"From you?" Still no move from Midoriya to acknowledge Sensei. "Apart from a professional desire for you to no longer engage in mass murder, torture, blackmail, human experimentation and all of the other associated breaches of basic human right that you're involved in?" The boy inclined his head. "Nothing really. I'm not interested because there's absolutely no point in asking you or expecting anything from you." Yet the boy was *still* alive for even voicing it.

"That can't be all," Sensei murmured, leaning forwards. "What do you really want? What if I could guarantee it?" Which, unbeknownst to Midoriya, was nothing short of a king's ransom as far as Sensei was concerned. He always knew which levers to push or pull and the specific leverage to reach his intended outcome. Never before had someone foiled him through sheer force of apathy. Never before had there been a person, let alone a sickly child, who had the option of scorched earth and reducing himself to nothing to deny Sensei what he wanted the most.

While the doctor couldn't see it, he could perfectly imagine the long, slow blink that came before Midoriya's response. "Nope… That's it. Not that I think you're capable of it either." Sensei flinched.

"There has to be more than work interests." For Sensei, there'd always been more than work. His brother's imprint had never faded from his memory, every moment dominated by that snapshot in time, seared

into Sensei's mind. Family had been and remained everything, with every act one for the collective if only they'd accept what they'd been given. If Midoriya had a family it wasn't one that was mentioned or discussed in any capacity. His mother, spoken of as though from a great distance. His father? Non-existent. Not so much as a whisper of an extended family. Friends? Midoriya didn't seem to have those either. Classmates weren't so much categorised by personal attachment as they were by Quirks or reliability or their applicable personality to the situation that was being discussed. The doctor could only speculate if Midoriya himself knew that he discussed his classmates in the same way that others did their favourite sets of clothes, but he wasn't sure if Midoriya would understand that comparison either. As it was, Midoriya was wearing an oversized t-shirt with *pyjamas* nearly printed across it in bold print and had the slippers to match.

The boy tilted his head. "What's wrong with work?" As if it wasn't obvious. Sensei had spent numerous lifetimes chasing after his brother's fleeting spirit and Midoriya's sole interest, by all the doctor could account for, was turning up to work, working, then leaving. If he wasn't at work, he was researching for work or sleeping in preparation for work. If he wasn't working, he was thinking about working. All Might in his more recent years had developed a social life of a sort, according to Sensei, but Midoriya was no All Might. It wasn't that Midoriya was incapable of understanding the social minutia around him, it was that it was beneath his notice and unless there was a specific issue for him to resolve, then it was also beneath his care. The people around him were only people so long as they had a problem to resolve and soon as his task was completed, Midoriya slipped back into the abyss with or without thanks, waiting to be summoned again.

If Sensei saw people as Quirks, then Midoriya saw them as puzzle boxes. Quirks all had their unique manifestations and implementations and when one of particular note crossed his path then Sensei would do his utmost best to nurse its potential. To bring the Quirk into the fold and ferment it to its maximum potential.

Midoriya on the other hand didn't look at people, so much as his unblinking gaze stared directly through them. Their Quirks and their usage was a reference for his own implementation at best. Their suffering, a code for interpretation, etched in nicks and groves along the edges of the box. So the boy would pick and prod and fiddle, drawer by drawer, panel by panel, secret by secret until all that remained was the token prize at its centre. Then, once that was

recovered and their crisis averted, he'd put them back together again, new and improved in design and send them on their way until they again needed solving. The fact that they were a person at all was immaterial, for it was the process that attracted Midoriya's attention and little else. Villain, hero, civilian, it didn't matter, for All Might's successor, there was no person, only a structure that Midoriya plucked away at, one mystery at a time.

It was no wonder that he could pull Sensei apart at the seams and the man savoured every moment, because for once he was the one being cracked open, piece by piece, examined, assessed for success or failure. For once, Sensei himself was put through his paces if he wanted to survive. Unlike All Might, the stakes were higher and the reward mythical provided Sensei could negotiate this brand new game.

"I want to see the Tokyo National Museum's new exhibition on vigilantes," Midoriya stated without affect.

"Deal." No hesitation, no question of how or where or why or the details. Absolutely none.

It didn't escape the doctor's notice that Midoriya hadn't actually agreed to anything on his end. Not that it mattered. Sensei impotently stared into the abyss and desperately wanted it to stare back.

They were almost at the end of it all. Finally. Finally they were making progress. The lectern was only metres away, but getting there and preparing the materials for this briefing had felt like an eternity. An eternity where young Midoriya suffered in the grips of All For One while they took their sweet time waiting for all of the pieces of the puzzle to come together. A puzzle so vivid in detail, so graphic in his goriness that the conceptualisation of it alone should've been a capital offence, let alone them picking through the pieces of its execution. Both All For One and his doctor, the architects of demise for so many people, innocent and guilty, would never have a sentence fit for their crimes.

Maruta? Garaki? Ujiko? Tsubasa? The old bastard sure had a lot of names, didn't he? Not that any of them were going to save him. The miserable pile of filth that'd been messing with young Midoriya's body had many names, a face and a paper trail so long that the Ds were tripping over themselves to collate it all. One Quirk expert, with more

names than anyone could count… one Quirk expert that'd spoken to both Endeavor and young Midoriya's mother and provided equally unhelpful advice in both cases. One Quirk expert that was connected to a boy that'd gone missing while attending school with young Midoriya. One Quirk expert that was connected to orphanages all over the country and to Jaku General Hospital, an area out in the moist armpit of nowhere. One Quirk expert that didn't have threads of red string linking him to missing persons cases, so much as he had an entire cargo plane fly over and cocoon the entire suburb with its contents. One Quirk expert connected to more suspicious disappearances than anyone else they'd ever seen. This same expert who plied his trade solely for the benefit of All For One.

His history stretched back well over seventy years if their photographs were lining up properly and Toshinori had a familiar niggle rolling around his head. All For One with his longevity Quirk, All For One who found someone who was every bit as much of a sick bastard as the man himself. A doctor with the technical know how and lack of ethics required to make All For One's research functional in reality. An area so grotesque that their foremost forensic experts were still in therapy, once they'd been able to confirm what Tsukauchi had only suspected, but now knew to be true.

Research into what exactly, none of them could say, but around the office, Toshinori's colleagues were calling it "necromancy". All For One's unending and now successful attempts to pull the dead back into the world of the living. The noumu were puppets at best, dancing on pre-programmed strings, but what they did to Midoriya and All For One himself highlighted the real technical extent of the doctor's skill. They weren't playing games and All For One had more than enough resources to nurse young Midoriya back to life, even if it left long term side effects. Death wasn't a limiting factor in All For One's operations and even death itself wasn't enough to save someone from being violated by Japan's foremost monster. From a strategic standpoint, for All For One who all too often reduced his opposition to scattered bits of meat, it might well be a formal requirement at this point in time, because any precision techniques had disappeared with him into death.

There were mountains of evidence linking it all to one man. One doctor with countless names, but only the one face. The real nail in the coffin that finished the old bastard off? It wasn't even Shinsou. Not Shinsou who caught the man in the act, nor was it All For One's suspicious lack of concern that his doctor had now been sighted (almost as if the doctor was yet another pawn to be sacrificed). It

wasn't Toshinori's team of detectives who worked day and night to smash together plots of data and make it work. No. It was Bakugou. Young Bakugou with an under resourced investigation run by kids that shouldn't have found much of anything. Bakugou who remembered an old classmate's grandfather's was a doctor and went on the off chance that there'd be insight. Anything small that'd help out. Little did Bakugou know that he'd hit the jackpot, because of all of his identities, his link to the late Tsubasa was the most damning.

It was sheer dumb luck that young Bakugou remembered Doctor "Tsubasa". One single thread of information that would've been easily missed had it not been for young Bakugou's decade plus long fury over the squabbles and expectations of children. All For One's chief supporter exposed by the petty grudges and fights of schoolchildren. For young Tsubasa was an orphan and the doctor's involvement in the boy's life was not only immediately evident, but entirely traceable. Even if the names were different, the facilities and patterns themselves neatly slotted into the jigsaw puzzle that was sprawled across this entire level of the police department. One child's seemingly irrelevant memory of a friend from school and All For One's entire ghost empire would come crashing down around his earholes.

This was it and Toshinori closed the gap between him and the final tool of Midoriya's rescue. There were no bribes, no explanations for the missing dead that'd work here. No inspectors or funeral directors who could be paid off with a quick fistful of cash. No politicians to fudge the numbers and hide the real number of missing and deceased people. No corrupt teachers to breach the privacy and sanctity of their wards. No pro heroes feeding All For One information on who had the latest and hottest Quirk. There was absolutely no one who could block what was to come.

No amount of All For One's meddling that was going to save the doctor now when Toshinori's authority for this investigation, bolstered by his results so far, was more than capable of flattening all arguments. All For One's doctor was done… and thanks to young Bakugou and Tomura Shigaraki they knew exactly where to find him.

"Ladies and gentlemen," Toshinori leaned forward, palms flat against the lectern, his teeth bared and he snarled in the direction of a small army of police. "*We got him.*"

Chapter End Notes

A little bit late for April Fools, but I'm not dead. It's just very hard

to edit chapters when your eyesight is as non-existent as mine.

Death of a Dream

Chapter Summary

The end of something beautiful.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jaku General Hospital, the good doctor's base of operations. There were no SWAT teams following in Toshinori's wake… at least not any visible ones. A crack team of pro heroes were shadowing Toshinori and the riot police who'd volunteered to kick in the bastard's front door were in plain clothes. No resistance so far. Too quiet, too ordinary, but there was no way they couldn't have noticed the small army of police marching through the corridors. But short of All For One himself appearing, it was nothing that was beyond Toshinori. Even the embers of One For All would be more than enough for All For One's watered down puppets.

"His office is this way, sirs," one of the administrators was panting as they hurried alongside them. The administrators were at a complete loss for why so many police were present and wasn't all that feasible that they were involved with the doctor's crimes. Understaffed, underpaid and underrepresented in their workplace rights, even the higher ups at the hospital didn't have the time or inclination to do their boss any favours even within their current purview of employment. No, the doctor's actions were constrained to him and All For One.

Toshinori strongly doubted the presence of young Midoriya on the premises… or perhaps it was more fervent hope that there'd be no evidence of young Midoriya's presence in this building. Out of what they'd traced in the doctor's various names, it was here where the majority of the chemicals were delivered. With Kurogiri down for the count, it made it that smidge easier to follow the industrial levels of pharmaceuticals moving in and around this particular hospital. If young Midoriya's presence was indicated here in any capacity…

Toshinori clawed his hand and audibly growled.

"I'm sorry sir, we'll take a shortcut!" Their guide picked up the pace.

Even if the doctor wasn't here, the lab itself was the most important

part. Through the lab there'd surely be breadcrumbs trailing all the way back to All For One and young Midoriya. The doctor was a footnote on their quest to find Midoriya.

It'd been a long, long time since Sansa had been part of a dedicated armed response team, but Yagi was more interested in them as known factors, rather than their capability with firearms. All Might was on standby, loitering out of view. If their perp tried anything… Well, if was for the best if the perp didn't try anything, because Sansa had heard that All Might was every ounce as thrilled with this entire saga of affairs as Yagi himself. That comment had the team breaking out in a cold sweat earlier, because a pissed off Yagi was bad enough. No one wanted to see a pissed off All Might if what everyone saw at Kamino was him as a consummate professional.

Still, it was a long walk and the tension was palpable. No alarms, no one on notice, no Noumu busting out from the basement. Too quiet and too calm for the hideout of All For One's chief minion. So they walked and walked and that sense of unease followed them deeper into the corridors. A sterile location filled with potential hostages and whatever experiments their nutcase of a target had locked in the basement. Joy.

To no one's shock, the old man's office was locked. "Do we need the battering ra-"

-CRUNCH.

With a wild kick, Yagi ejected the door from its hinges and it toppled to the floor. No battering ram, no charges, nada. "That won't be necessary, Tamakawa. I'm here after all," dripped with such menace that Sansa's fur immediately bristled. It was natural for All Might's personal assistant to pick up a few of the man's personality quirks, but if Sansa could go the rest of his life never hearing Yagi utter those words ever again…

Icy. Sansa shuddered away the phantom chill.

But Yagi led on and the rest of the police closed in behind as they stepped in to Garaki's office. There sat their target. At first Sansa had thought it was a life sized mannikin, but no, that was him alright, Doctor Garaki or whatever the hell he called himself. Seated in his wheelie chair facing them, as if he'd been in the middle a greeting a guest before he was struck down. Frozen in time. His mouth still open,

eyes staring, arm raised in welcome. Struck down by what Sansa couldn't say, with Yagi stalking over for a closer inspection.

"Suspended Animation," Yagi growled after about twelve seconds of examination. "He's not dead, yet, but whatever he did to displease All For One, it means it won't be quick." Yagi scooped up one of the doctor's own pens and knocked aside the mad scientist's glasses. "See this? Signs of decay and advanced ageing around his eyes." It was punctuated with a sharp stab to the face with the pointy end of the pen. No blood. No anything. "The moment Suspended Animation wears off he'll be dead or desperately wishing that he was dead. All it's done is delay his imminent demise." Why delay it at all?

"Sir," another officer called from further back. "What's the point? Why not kill them outright?" Tanaka was a brave one, because Yagi's mercurial temperament was intimidating at best and pant shittingly terrifying in these situations as a standard.

"The point, is that the doctor here made a very big oopsie doopsie and All For One wants to prolong his suffering as much as possible before the final curtain call," their superior grunted, now examining the doctor's gums with the very same pen. "I'd bet good money on it, even if the original Quirk didn't maintain subject awareness while suspended, that All For One made a modification or two to send the message home. Garaki here finally worked out that All For One doesn't have any friends and all of his business associates are disposable." Their skeleton boss leered unpleasantly at the ex-doctor. "Too late to leave now, though. You can check out any time you like, buddy, but you can never *leave*. Better to not be involved at all when it comes to All For One." A death sentence. It was a matter of if, not when, because the moment their usefulness expired, so did All For One's intentions of keeping them alive. Whatever had happened to make the doctor decay and breakdown, when he'd only been seen by staff an hour earlier, was another insidious Quirk that had to be tracked.

"Oi, Yagi," one of Endeavor's Sidekick's yelled from around the corner. "You think that's bad you should see what he's packing downstairs. That missing persons register is going to need a dedicated overtime team as soon as forensics are done. Can one of you let rostering know before this gives admin back at the station a heart attack? We need way more people down here for sweeping and evidence collection."

"Show me. Tanaka, keep an eye on this dead weight and see what he's

got on him. The rest of us will head downstairs," Yagi barked and their entire squad snapped to attention.

Down, down, down into the depths of the personal hell of all of the people that'd disappeared at All For One's hands.

Sansa's fur bristled. "Oh fuck me," one of the other police whispered. "This really is the place, then." So many bodies. Tanks filled with rows upon rows of Noumu. Yes, this was definitely the place. None them had a shock of green hair visible through the glass and Sansa let out a puff of air. A small detail, but a welcome one. But the other Noumu… there was no way all of them were adults and his stomach gurgled unpleasantly. They'd known from Midoriya's abduction that even the young weren't immune, but the scale of this operation… Rostering would be calling in far more than their standard overtime crew. Would have to call in specialists teams who had the experience and guts to pull apart and conduct identification on an entire graveyard of the deceased. They weren't trained for… *this*.

"What I don't understand is why all of this equipment and evidence was left behind," Endeavor was saying to Yagi, whose wide eyes were set on his phone as it made a gentle tone. "This is decades upon decades of research into full blown necromancy. Why didn't All For One transfer these projects to another agent?" The hero's moustache flamed ominously. "Not trusting a peon with the job is one thing, but this isn't a cheap financial investment."

One moment he was there, the next he was off and running. "Unless he doesn't need it anymore," Yagi yelled over his shoulder and practically sprinted from the crime scene with his ringing phone in hand.

Katsuki should've fucking ignored the crumpled up bit of paper left beneath Mrs Midoriya's door. Should've ignored it fucking entirely, but Katsuki's intuition had its limits. His phone spent all morning bugging out courtesy of the underpaid intern who managed to reverse the polarity of the local cell tower from being excellent to Why the Fuck am I Paying for This? in a matter of hours. Instead he got dressed, left Mrs Midoriya a note and spent his time on the train glaring at his phone which still didn't have any fucking reception. All the way to Tokyo. Instead he squinted at the note he'd been left, but there was nothing remarkable about it with only eyeballs to scan the paper.

Tokyo National Museum - 12PM. Early Vigilantes Exhibit.

Neat, flavourless handwriting. Block print, nothing fancy. Completely bland. Naturally, it was a fucking trap, but short of All For One falling out of a nearby hedge, Katsuki doubted there was anything he couldn't handle. If it was some arsehole with a bone to pick against Mrs Midoriya or him or even the Todoroki family, Katsuki was more than qualified in emergency dispute resolution.

It was just Katsuki's luck that he placed precisely one toe into the Early Vigilantes Exhibit and All For fucking One materialised out thin air not ten metres away from him. All For One and Deku, the latter dressed like he'd been hoisted out of bed for the event. Katsuki flung himself behind the nearest cabinet and dug through multiple layers of pocket lint. There was his phone with the expected lack of reception. If All For One could jam all communications at the USJ, including cell reception, then it was natural for him to have kept the Quirk now, which meant that Katsuki was right about this being a trap. But a trap for who? Bleary eyed and yawning, Deku didn't see him at all and All For One was making it a point to not glance backwards at him. Was it a trap at all or was this bastard trying to make a point? As it was, Katsuki hadn't seen anyone else apart from the lady at the front door and maybe… just maybe there was a reason for why no one else was here. So it was a trap, just not a trap intending bodily harm… yet.

Option One. Katsuki could pull a Glasses and manually alert the authorities that All For One was present. Problem: It'd be a cold day in hell before All For One ever relinquished Search, which meant that All For One would be able to dip as soon as he saw All Might coming. Deku and All For One would vanish yet again and they still wouldn't have more information on why All For One was obsessed with Deku.

Option Two. Katsuki shadows them around the exhibit and gathers as much information as humanly possible for when All Might could be contacted to kick in the front door. All Might was already in the middle of paying a house call to Doctor Shitstain, because that's all that'd be fucking left of him as soon as Mr Yagi was done having him assist with enquiries.

Both options were equally shit and left a bad taste in Katsuki's mouth. Leaving All For One alone with Deku was self explanatory and Katsuki didn't have the firepower or backup to make an attempt at grabbing Deku and running because of Search. Trying to engage All For One wasn't even an option, because Deku would try to help and Katsuki seeing protruding cheekbones was enough to indicate how useful he'd

be in a fight even if they did double team the gangly fuck. The only real option that didn't involve a fatality was sitting as quietly as possible, hoping to god that All For One's desire to keep ahold of Deku outweighed his natural leanings towards being a fucking idiot.

"Ah, this brings back memories. You chose this place deliberately, didn't you, Izuku?" First name terms. All For One was on first name terms with Deku. As much as it made Katsuki vomit into the nearest garbage bin or antique vase. If it was just there for show, then his acting skills were top tier because All For One hovered over the syllables as much as Inko Midoriya. You couldn't fake that level of familiarity. Deku choosing the destination and All For One following through on it was a weirder situation.

"Well, you don't talk about your past without prompting, so…" Deku made a sweeping motion. "You ask a lot of questions about me, but this time it's your turn. What do you remember about these people?"

"You're using me as a tour guide," All For One clapped his hand to his chest in exaggerated offence. "Well, if you insist. What a colourful group of individuals they were…" Pacing forwards, he halted and pointed at a display showing the Meta Liberation Army. "History is written just as much by the losers as the victors, Izuku. The Meta Liberation Army would have you believe that their interests lie in equal representation for those with more disastrous Quirks. That Quirks are to be used freely without any constraints imposed by the government." Yeah, because with society's current level of psychopaths, that totally wouldn't end up in the majority of city centres being turned into craters in the ground Kamino style. All For One off the leash for example, as if that by description alone wasn't catastrophic without the addition of all of the drugged up, Trigger using freaks who'd come with him as an addon.

"What did you see instead? They don't have the benefit of these stories not being challenged when you lived through it all." So that's why they were here specifically, Deku wanted to know more about All For One of the past.

"I saw a cult filled with useful idiots who wanted to claw their way to the top of society, in spite of their lack of ability to meaningfully contribute." Sounded like All For One himself, when he put it like that. "Maladjusted, independent wealth lacking, mentally unstable degenerates who were a liability to any and all operations, all bound together with a tidy little creation myth of Destro's mother calling Meta Ability's Quirks as if they changed what people were at their

core." All For One gestured over at a pansy wearing a domino mask. "Destro in reality had no attachment to any of his family members." Leering through vocal expression alone was a quality unique to this bastard. "Nobody questions how his mother's desire for Quirk equality morphed into the current goal of the strong ruling the weak with Quirks, or why he loved his mother so much that he removed all memory of her name from existence because that's inconvenient to the narrative. Titles are far catchier than any of the meaning attached to a name." Nah, All For One wasn't at all bitter about a title replacing a name. "She wasn't a person, but a symbol of the cause." Much like All For One was the Symbol of Terror… even if no one knew why he was causing it in the first place or what practical benefit he gained from society being a hole in the ground.

"So he was the same as Shigaraki, then?" Deku's head was turned towards All For One. "Societal reject fishing for an excuse for why he wasn't at fault."

Snorting, All For One shook his head. "That's a disservice to Tomura, considering who founded the Meta Liberation Army. What happened *in reality* is that Chikara Yotsubashi was little more than your regular fiend with a proclivity for the ladies and the cult provided him adequate supply for both that and his never ending sense of victimhood," All For One concluded so bluntly that Deku coughed and Katsuki stomped on a rogue snigger. He would not laugh at Deku's murderer. "He had more than one child, of course, but only the descendent with the Quirk closest to the father's own mattered to what remained of his braindead power base. Naturally, in the interests of maintaining this legacy, they kept the family name Yotsubashi alive as well as the cult colours in the Detnerat company colours."

Deku's reflection in one of the gleaming panels appeared to do a double take.

"Yes, really. They were that inspired. So skilled at hiding their criminal enterprise that one can immediately locate them through a Google search," All For One *groaned*. "I may have my moments, Izuku, but remember that they purport themselves to be the *competition*." Competing for the Moron of the Year Award, if anyone asked Katsuki. All these people had waiting for them was the death penalty if they were lucky and a toasty prison cell in Tartarus if they weren't lucky. At least with the death penalty they'd eventually leave.

"You historically don't have competition. From what I've read, they either join under your associated organisations or you wipe them off

the face of the planet." Was that… Katsuki leaned sideways and spied Deku's notebook. Of course he had fucking notes. Notes that All For One, without any shame at all, was enthusiastically reading over Deku's shoulder. Any doubts Katsuki had about whether or not this was the real Izuku Midoriya died explosively in that instant. This was the real deal, notebook and all.

"Correct again. Hostile takeovers were always my specialty." Which didn't explain why there was so little about this bastard when everyone else was still in the public eye decades later. It was almost as if All For One had done his best to avoid anyone remembering him. "Oji Harima…" There was a long pause before All For One shrugged. "These details will tell you that he stole from wealthy heroes enriched by government policies and gave back to poor civilians." Yeah fucking right. Anyone who'd followed the news for five minutes or read any of the court roundups knew that most villainy was theft and that money went straight into whatever flavour of the minute shit villains were into these days.

"But in the real world he kept most of it for himself and the civilians were actually his criminal cohort," Deku filled in without a beat. "There's no credible records attributing traceable charity to Harima, nor anyone who came forward as a beneficiary because of the proceeds of crime laws and them being made an accessory." That was a tap of pen on paper. "On the other hand, you were around at the time and would've been on top of all of the gossip."

"You make it sound like we were a knitting circle instead of a collection of hardened criminals." Katsuki hoped All For One was scowling, when everything that just came out of his mouth bled granny gossip network. "But yes, it was clear to me that Harima was attempting to court public favour, but the vast majority of his stolen wealth stayed with him." For an instant, All For One's hazy features came into view, teeth gritted. "Nothing in this display is remotely accurate to the times. None of these people were true vigilantes and none of what they did was for the purpose of uplifting the less fortunate. Everyone had a narrative, really." Everyone apart from All For One. "Everyone had a reason for why they were misunderstood and why society was to blame." Not much had changed in the last couple of centuries of criminology, Katsuki could give him that much.

"But not you," Deku's shaking head was caught in a display's reflection. "There's almost nothing about you." All For One was about to open his mouth… before Deku reached around a hand and casually pinched All For One's lips shut. Katsuki's jaw sagged open. He fucking

didn't. "Every single one of these people has a grand ideological motive, apart from you. Being the Demon King isn't even attempting to run a narrative." Deku flipped his book shut. "It's a distraction, so what were you really doing?" Months. All For One had been stuck dealing with Deku's shit for months. There was karma coming out the arse and Katsuki hoped All For One fucking squirmed like the shit weasel he was, with Deku sinking in the barbs. Glorious.

A long delay. "I wouldn't call it a distraction as such… The books my brother read brought him some semblance of joy, so I thought that if I could make a world like that…" Holy fucking shit. Was he serious? All of this shit? The murders? The experiments? Fucking all of it for *this*? No fucking wonder All For One never bothered to explain himself. The plan was literally fuck you to everyone apart from his brother.

"That you'd finally worm your way into his good graces." Deku concluded. "There's no narrative, because you never had a goal beyond giving your brother what you thought he wanted." It made more sense than Katsuki would've liked. This entire situation was to bait All For One into talking about it and Deku had almost perfectly closed the trap. Shame the trap didn't include why Deku was still alive, but progress was progress.

"Then he died…" Quiet. No eye contact this time. All of the wind was gone from his sails.

"And spent all of these decades chasing after a Quirk that was a lie." Wait, what? What about One For All was a lie? "What your brother wanted was escape from reality, not to make fiction reality. This," Deku poked All For in the chest, "is why you ask people for what they want instead of trying to read their minds without a Quirk. What your brother wanted, was his health, to be a normal person who could live his life independently, but instead you forced a Quirk on him and killed him even faster." Killed him even faster… Had One For All itself killed the brother instead of it being a direct act? If it killed All For One's brother, then what was it like now? What was it doing to *Deku*? All Might had to know about this - as soon as he had reception.

"He shouldn't have had to ask-," All For One began.

Deku jabbed him in the chest, forcing Japan's biggest dickhead to take a step back. "It's not about should or shouldn't. You can take as many Quirks as you like, but you will never have a full understanding of that person even with their Quirk. You aren't a mind reader. A Quirk is not a whole person. You still need to *talk to people*," Deku

enunciated as if he was speaking to a five year old. Katsuki smirked. "If they don't tell you what's up, then you *ask* them."

"You make it sound so easy. No one's honest about what they want," All For One drawled.

"That's confident coming from the person who's never bothered to ask," Deku shot back. "You don't have any experience with it because you never tried." Or regularly communicated with anyone who wasn't an unhinged psychopath. That had to colour his views as well.

"Oh, shall we test it?" All For One purred. "What do you want, Izuku Midoriya?" Oh that poor bastard. He couldn't have picked a worse person to ask, because Izuku Midoriya didn't have a single shit to give when it came to telling people what that wanted to hear. If you asked Izuku Midoriya for his opinion, you'd get his opinion regardless of how much it mind screwed you on hearing the details. Shigaraki and all of 1-A had discovered Deku's smiling assassin tendencies the hard way. Midoriya might be all about saving people, but dragging your patient through hot embers, broken glass and breaking their ribs in the process was still a legal rescue. Izuku Midoriya was perfectly fine with smashing people to pieces if it meant a better person rose from the ashes. Anyone else would call it cruel, but that'd be intent that never applied to Deku. Deku wanted to help people and sometimes that meant breaking half the bones in their body and bashing in a portion of their brain.

Deku visibly perked up. "What I want… is to be able to go out and live my life and go to work without anyone worrying about what I do. No one ever worried about All Might and it'd be nice if I could go out and help people the same way, with the same level of skill." Yep, that was Deku all right. Helping people and everyone fucking off and minding their own business while he did so.

"What about your family?" All For One was the most appalled Katsuki had ever heard him.

"I have absolutely nothing in common with mum," Deku pointed out. "Dad left me alone with a person who had less interest in my life than All Might did when he was a random stranger to me. The first serious conversation I had about my future career path was with All Might after he saved me from the villain who tried to kill Bakugou." Bakugou. Not Kacchan. Bakugou. So fucking wrong. Everything about hearing Deku say his surname was wrong, but Katsuki not being fast enough got Deku killed and Katsuki was prepared to face those

consequences. At least Katsuki had made it out alive and wasn't in any position to complain about what Deku did or didn't call him. "You had a family where you mattered, but I always got the impression that mum was better off without me."

Katsuki felt his legs slide out from under him, not because he couldn't see it, but because after living with Inko Midoriya that he could see exactly where Deku had picked up the idea. Inko Midoriya was the personification of social anxiety. It wasn't just pro heroes that set her off, but contact with the uncertainty of the outside world in general. Deku could've been born with the same level of combat ability as All For One himself and she still would've tried to drag him back because of that one percentage point of risk. She was paralysed by fear and brought everyone down with her in the process. Without her willing to voice, shield or support him and with Deadbeat Senior missing in action, Deku had no problem stepping away from her and everyone like her. She didn't make enough of a difference in his life for him to still meaningfully care about her contributions. Katsuki's heart sank.

"I am so sorry," All For One reached out for Deku's shoulder. This was Deku's life. Getting sympathy from a shithead and a serial killer. What a life.

"For what?" Deku raised an eyebrow, ducking away from him.

"For not kidnapping you earlier." For how exasperated he sounded, it was as if it should've been the most obvious course of action. "You could've avoided this if I'd acted sooner." Which meant All For One knew about Deku far earlier for it to have been considered as a possibility. In another timeline, could he have been another Tsubasa?

"But you didn't and dwelling on it won't change what happened." Quick, to the point and a total shutdown. One with implications that made Katsuki's stomach churn. "Your turn, what do you want?" Deku turned and for the first time Katsuki could see both unscarred hands and stifled a hiss. The scar tissue had entirely disappeared, but he was still too thin. Izuku Midoriya might've been back from the dead, but a price was paid for the privilege.

"For my family to be happy," All For One sighed. "Everything else is a means to an end." Is that what floated All For One's boat? Feeding off the contentment of those around him? Living through people, instead of living his own life? Almost as if his own personal experiences meant nothing to him emotionally…

“What if they were happier without you because of your career path?” Deku asked and it wasn’t a bad question. Families who had criminals in them always got the blame, even if only one relative was a freak bad egg. Being related to All For One on the other hand was the closest approximation Katsuki had ever seen to a literal target being painted in real time. All For One's family, if any of them survived this long, were screwed by virtue of his reputation and lifespan. “What if everything you did pushed them further away from you, all because you didn’t ask them about what they wanted?”

“Then…” All For One hesitated. “Then perhaps I would compromise and reconsider said career path,” was almost reluctantly admitted.

“Even if it meant you had to window shop instead of stealing Quirks?” Deku glared at him and All For One shrank back.

“But that’s not me, Izuku.” Katsuki wanted to slam his head against the display he was hiding behind because, because why was not being an arsehole so hard for these people? All he had to do was resist the urge to be a dickhead. It wasn’t that difficult. Bit of practice, a huge amount of active impulse control and it was like riding a bicycle each time you needed to use it.

“You sure about that? Keep in mind, that without a body, your Quirk isn’t much of anything. You should know that better than anyone. You never needed your Quirk to be there for your son, you know,” Deku muttered. “All you had to do was be there and be supportive and none of that required your Quirk.” Son. All For One’s son. He had a *son*? All the air left Katsuki’s lungs. What the fuck was going on?

“Really?” Disbelief.

“Yes, really. Unless you think mum needed her Quirk to take an interest in my life?” Living the dream, Midoriya was rubbing his temples. “Your brother and son would’ve both made it to old age if you were with them instead of starting gang wars. At this point, it’s not even that you’re a villain, so much as you’re surrounded by so many idiots that no one with a brain would ever want to be associated with you. Maybe you can handle the embarrassment, but why should they have to deal with that?”

All For One opened his mouth and no words came out. Katsuki wasn’t doing any better. Deku’s filter had died a fiery death and Katsuki couldn’t breathe through the lung spasms. “That’s… not a bad point, now that you mention it,” eventually left him the faintest of whispers,

as if his entire worldview had been upended with a sledgehammer to the jaw. “But one we should discuss elsewhere.”

All For One turned around and immediately made eye contact with Katsuki, paused… then fucking *winked* at him like a creep. The moment All For One and Deku vanished, Bakugou’s phone gently dinged as cell reception was restored.

“You motherfucker.”

Chapter End Notes

Four to go.

Mr Yagi

Chapter Summary

Gazing into certain madness.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Hospital of Horrors, the newspapers were calling it. Shouto didn't think there'd been a more understated title in the recent history of the country. Even calling it a hospital, when it was a cover for an illegal lab dedicated to human experimentation, felt like the papers were giving Garaki too much credit. The entire hospital had to be evacuated not due to the Noumu, but the unregistered structural changes that'd been made to the underground levels of the hospital. It was less basement, more extensive tunnel system that'd passed no safety or building inspections. They didn't even need the emergency evacuation sirens, because the shrieks from the local government building inspector the moment he stuck his head underground were just as effective. Right now, Garaki's flagrant ignoring of the guidelines was far more dangerous to the patients than the Noumu below. The Noumu which remained silent and unmoving, much to the paranoia of the investigation team. The team in which Shouto and his schoolmates were not technically members.

Them being allowed in here at all was a signal from the school. They weren't off the hook for Kamino yet, but Aizawa had argued that transparency with the investigation into Midoriya's disappearance would prevent repeat incidents. All of 1-A had agreed to that assessment, but after the capture of Vlad King, UA itself had to know that the trust between staff and students was well and truly dead. At best, this was Aizawa and Midnight's well thought out scheme to keep them busy and in eye view at all times, while Yagi prowled around the investigators and crime scene. It was a nice gesture at the very least.

Of course, 1-A weren't allowed into the basement area where the lion's share of the experimentation had taken place, been stored and later discovered by the extremely green faced crime scene investigators. Being head to toe in their protective gear wasn't enough to stop the stench that followed them and their clothes back upstairs. Hazard pay didn't cover irreparable psychological damage either. For now, all Shouto could do to help them was man the drink station,

while the rest of 1-A brainstormed their discoveries with Mr Yagi. If anything was being withheld from them, the police were far more likely to discuss it between themselves without Yagi breathing down their throats by virtue of his very existence. Even if it meant sharing the same bench as Endeavor, who was paging through a thick wad of reports with an ever increasing frown.

“There’s still no guarantee that it’s Touya, you know.” Nor would Shouto ever trust Garaki’s assessment of his own handiwork. While Shouto didn’t have the strongest memories of his older brother, nothing about Dabi set off any degree of familiarity. The rest of the family might’ve been holding out hope that deep down Touya was still alive. With over thirty lives extinguished at the hands of a serial killer, Shouto was rather more hoping that his brother would stay dead for the sake of the victims’ families.

Endeavor was flexing his hands. “It doesn’t matter if he’s Touya or not at this rate,” Endeavor frowned, lifting the cheap cup to his mouth. “Dabi is still what’s left of Touya after Garaki’s work. I can see a shadow of your brother, but Dabi is… Touya was emotional, but never…” Not the same. Not Dabi.

“An unrestrained lunatic,” Shouto concluded. “So was Touya a test run for the technology? Yagi thinks that All For One’s weaker Quirk wise, but is largely the same. From what Bakugou said, apart from a few minor difference, Midoriya’s also… mostly the same.” Felt dirty wording it that way, but apart from a blunter edge to how he spoke to people, Midoriya appeared to be intact in the personality department (but that could've also been who he was dealing with). Was that All For One’s plan for Midoriya? A new class of Noumu? Yet, Midoriya didn’t have the programmed obedience of the more mindless Noumu, nor the foaming at the mouth psychopathy that came with Dabi or the others that also operated in his class. There was none of the hallmark mental instability they’d seen in the Noumu or Dabi. Midoriya himself was made of crazy before he died, so if anything had changed they’d need to wait for his rescue to make an accurate assessment.

“Small favours that Midoriya didn’t turn out the same as Dabi. Can you imagine being on the receiving end of Midoriya, now that we know what was in his journals?” For that second, Endeavor’s persona slipped and Shouto blinked dumbly at his perturbed expression. “His Quirk is already comparable to All Might’s raw strength and his proclivity towards live analysis… I shouldn’t have been so harsh to him at the Festival,” Endeavor relented. "If I'd known..." If Endeavor knew what was coming later that year and how much Midoriya had

been responsible for Shouto's survival of the events, it'd have been a very different conversation.

“Yeah, Midoriya’s got a scary toolset at the best of times,” Shouto agreed, his mind settling on the Cavalry Battle and Midoriya lining up that single deterrent blow that had every opposing team scattering. Hopefully All For One got a taste of that sensation for himself.

“I don’t think All For One’s after Midoriya as a Noumu. The Noumu are cannon fodder or muscle at best. His functioning brain is worth more than his Quirk.” Endeavor tossed his paper cup and it drifted through the air and into the nearby bin. “Midoriya received the same level of care as All For One himself and that speaks for his value as an asset.” This was only one facility as well, with one specific type of Noumu. What if there were more like Dabi out in the wilderness? Thinking, breathing, acting, uncannily human sleeper weapons, waiting to go off at All For One’s command? Midoriya though, wasn't one of them, in spite of the golden opportunity.

As far as the Noumu were concerned, Shouto was confident in his assessment that there was never a plan for Midoriya to be counted among their number. There arose a second issue… when the pawns and other chess pieces were removed from play, what was left to attract All For One’s interest when he wasn’t playing the game? What did All For One do when he wasn't being All For One?

Neito wasn’t quite at Midoriya’s level for Quirk connoisseurship, but Doctor Garaki’s recovery was never going arrive. Entirely by design he was certain, because the bad doctor didn’t contain a dud. He contained nothing at all. A hollow and empty wooden doll that had now been thrown into the nearest scrap pile.

“He’s Quirkless,” Neito stated bluntly to Yagi, the police and UA classmates that surrounded them. “The variant of Suspended Animation we tested at the hospital didn’t prevent me from copying Quirks and I can only operate under the assumption that All For One’s acquisition works in the same manner. There was nothing present in the doctor for me to copy.” Flaring his hands, Neito gestured at his co-conspirators. “It’s not that All For One gave him a Quirk, but that he’s taken away whatever was keeping our friend here alive in the first place. When the Quirk loses effectiveness, his life will come to an end.” In whatever dank prison cell they offloaded him into, because he wasn’t worth a hospital bed after what’d been found in his own

“medical” facility. More palliative care patients were found floating in jars downstairs than in their graves, according to the DNA tests that’d already come back. All For One couldn’t have happened to a nicer person, even if it was his own associate.

“All For One’s longevity Quirk had to come from somewhere,” Yagi was nodded, pen flying along his notebook. “From the medical examination, the visible damage is consistent with rapid ageing. Could the doctor be the source?” Mr Yagi. A mystery wrapped in a riddle who popped out from unseemly places and left every one of his colleagues trembling like a leaf on the wind. Or so he'd heard, Neito hadn't seen any evidence of such behaviour for himself. The man was ridiculously competent for a detective though and All For One's reign would've come to an end far sooner if Yagi wasn't working for All Might. Progress for the investigation had been nothing short of breakneck.

“If it is the same Quirk, we can have Eraserhead stare at All For One and he’ll die of old age.” Flippant, but if the longevity Quirk had no inertia to it then anything that could turn off All For One’s Quirk factor was a nifty killing blow that spared everyone the danger of going toe to toe with a juggernaut.

“Can All For One duplicate Quirks?” The entire table full of professionals and wannabe professionals fixed their eyes on Kaminari. “What? It’s a serious question.” That… was a very scary question. "How does both he and the mad scientist have the same Quirk?"

“Dumbass has got a point, you know. All For One pulled a Deku and was going on about his fun Quirk combinations in ear reach in Kamino. He definitely mentioned having stacks or multiples of Quirks,” Bakugou explained, making notes of his own. “Forensics also found containers with genetic material in them and the Noumu had DNA from multiple people. Maybe Doctor Shitstain can splice Quirks into those corpses without All For One on hand and that’s why there’s two of his Quirk around.” And an equally scary answer from the resident loudmouth.

“Not a bad idea, Bakugou,” Yagi uttered around the pen he was chewing on. “Good work for raising it Kaminari. That’s gonna be a pain in the arse…” Yagi mumbled and the entire table murmured an approximate buzz of sympathy. Completely unlike the silent police hovering around the edge of the conference who twitched whenever Yagi spoke.

“Yessir,” the blond meekly replied.

“Then why take the Quirk if it’s not needed?” Neito carried on. “Sure, it’s a horrific death if All For One plans on stepping through Suspended Animation's timeline, but at his age he wouldn’t need the Quirk for himself at this point.” It was already tested by All For One himself still maintaining much of his youth… if you could call it youth. Redundancy, perhaps?

“What if it’s for Midoriya?” Mineta’s hands were in his mouth. “He kept the doctor around for a long time, right? What if Midoriya’s the replacement for him instead of Shigaraki?” The silence that followed said it all.

“That’s fucking horrifying. Deku would never agree to any of that shit.” All For One wasn't in the habit of obtaining consent from the Noumu and Neito doubted Midoriya would be any different.

Agreement hummed through the meeting.

“I can see him doing that as well, even against Midoriya’s wishes” Yagi grimaced, his body undergoing a spasm as his face contorted. “Normally death via old age would be a saving grace, but if he’s got a spare longevity Quirk, he never needs to let go with or without Suspended Animation. Especially if All For One wants to keep Midoriya around for his Quirk as well.”

“Why… hasn’t All For One taken Midoriya’s Quirk?” Ashido was rocking on the two hind legs of her chair. “It’s in a league of its own.”

“Because he’ll fucking explode.” Ever the master of succinctness, their Bakugou. “All For One’s Quirk might be the greatest thing since sliced bread, but his hardware may as well be an electric potato masher compared to the supercomputers the current generation of Quirk owners use. His body isn’t adapted for modern Quirks. Even if he had it before, he can't do it now.” Small blessings that All For One was still an old fart at heart.

“Everything he stole beforehand was for preserving and containing an active and long term prisoner,” Uraraka’s quiet contrasted to Bakugou’s nearly incoherent snarls. “Pain Numbing for injuries, Electrical Currents to stimulate the nervous system, Paralysis for… restraint… Suspended Animation might’ve always been a last resort.” She was fidgeting with her mug.

“It’s safe to assume at this point, that All For One’s interests align with

an alive and coherent Izuku Midoriya, instead of a deceased meat puppet Izuku Midoriya?" Neito asked received the assent of their roundtable. "Those same interests which have now resulted in Doctor Garaki's slow and agonising death after decades of unquestioned loyalty, up until this point." Loyalties that clearly *were* being questioned in the lead up to his demise. If the doctor had performed without fault, he would still be alive, instead of abandoned with his experiments.

The doctor was most definitely in hell, but of whose making? All For One might've been the executioner, but had Midoriya been involved, even accidentally in the design? This series of events had proven definitively that Izuku Midoriya was worth substantially more to All For One, operationally or otherwise, than the doctor who clawed them both back from death's embrace. That was no small compliment coming from All For One. So what had Midoriya done to earn such a status *prior* to Kamino?

It wasn't the politically correct perspective, but there was times where Hitoshi was relieved that villains like All For One existed. Relieved in the sense that there was no better demonstration of what a real fiend could do when their mind was turned towards acts of great evil. Hitoshi might have Brainwashing, but All For One's options for causing chaos were limitless. Whatever he was capable of using, he was capable of blending with other Quirks as force multipliers and Midoriya's cracking of the whip to hand Brainwashing back had Hitoshi's eyes watering in gratitude. Not the least because of what All For One could've done to Midoriya's brain with limitless applications.

"It's uncharacteristic of him," Yagi grunted and the surrounding police quailed. "All For One, in my experience with him, never gave back any of the Quirks he'd taken, even if it was more beneficial for him to give them back. You've seen the Noumu for yourself. There was a lot of useless crap in there Quirk wise, where if he was willing to give up stock for better options, they'd have more of an impact. He's a compulsive hoarder." Midoriya kept notes. All For One kept the real deal, then stole Midoriya and his notes for good measure.

"So why did he give back mine?" Hitoshi clasped his hands. "A kleptomaniac who… isn't a kleptomaniac under the right circumstances? Or did he duplicate it before he gave it back?" A kleptomaniac on a leash?

“Because of Midoriya,” Bakugou thumped the table. “I saw the exact same shit you did, when you saw them together. All For One’s falling over himself to keep Deku in a good mood. Whatever’s going on with Deku is forcing All For One to not be a massive dick. If he gave it back, I can’t see him duplicating it without going through hell with Deku.” A monster over a hundred year’s old, snuggling up to a teenager like Midoriya was a toddler. It must’ve eaten away at Midoriya to be babied by his own murderer. All For One wasn’t asking any questions about Midoriya’s Quirk according to Bakugou. It’s as if… he already knew all the details. Then again, All For One was responsible for the creation of Midoriya’s Quirk wasn’t he? Keeping tabs would be a natural part of that arrangement. To give the Quirk, but not able to take it back meant that the Quirk had been altered during its stay with Midoriya and was now exceeding All For One’s bodily limits.

“What does Midoriya bring to the table that no one else offers or can offer?” Hitoshi’s eyes shot between Yagi, Monoma and the 1-A class members.

“Quirk analysis,” Uraraka jumped in first. “Deku has journals filled with not only the analysis of Quirks but the people using them. Mainly heroes, but notable villains too.”

“Had, before All For One stole most of them,” Bakugou cut in. “All For One pocketed all of that shit after he raided Midoriya’s house.” Midoriya’s skills should be negligible compared to All For One’s own. The journals had to contain other desirable information.

“Is it really that unique?” Hitoshi knew it was a stupid question when the entirety of the table, including Yagi, incredulously stared at him.

“You shitting me? Only two person I’ve ever seen talk about Quirks that way are Deku and All For One.”

“I concur. I’ve got decades in policing and I haven’t so much as seen a forum post that even remotely compares to what those two pull out at short notice,” Yagi added, sipping his cup of tea. “All For One was entirely unique in this regard until Izuku Midoriya came along.”

“What about the doctor?” Tsuyu butted in. “He was an expert in Quirks. Enough for the Noumu to work.”

“It’s not the same,” Monoma sliced a hand through the air and Hitoshi twitched. “What that wretched man did was on the technical side of the fence. All For One and Midoriya are artists in their field. The

choice of canvas, the style, the perspective, colours, the reference and application - all this is decided upon by All For One, according to Shigaraki. Shigaraki may have been allowed to dabble here and there in the creation process, but lacked artistic vision. Mixing Quirks isn't as elementary as slapping together the coolest combination." Well, he'd know. Even if Monoma could only use one at a time and had no ability for parallel Quirks, there was still synergy required in what he borrowed for it to be usable. Pick a bad combination and he was defenceless, just like All For One. Stock selection was key to using their individual Quirks competently.

"If there's no one else like Midoriya, would it really be that strange for All For One to compromise?" Ida was also resting on his fingertips, glasses glinting ominously. "If Midoriya has what he wants, then he's not been left with his usual solution for resource acquisition."

"Normally, All For One forces or blackmails others into doing his bidding via his Quirks. A deviation would indicate to me that he thinks he's hit the jackpot. Without any alternative pathways, he's forced to comply with Midoriya's wishes." There was a clatter as Yagi reshuffled his notes. "His inability to take Midoriya's Quirk would've ruined his century plus old operating procedure."

In short, Hitoshi's Quirk was returned to maintain the ongoing "relationship" with Midoriya. The Quirk might've been an obstruction, but this wasn't about the Quirk, was it? "It's… it's almost like he wants Midoriya to trust him," Hitoshi whispered, under his breath.

It didn't save him from the reply. "Fat fucking chance, Extra. Deku doesn't trust anyone. Doesn't tell his own *mother* jack shit." With what happened at Kamino, Hitoshi didn't have think all that much about why Midoriya didn't tell his mother anything. Hitoshi wouldn't have told his parents anything either.

"Yeah, but does All For One know that?"

"Funny you should mention that," Yagi smirked over his clasped hands. "All For One doesn't trust anyone either."

Then was a low thud as Kirishima slammed his head into the table. "Why would a miserable old guy, who doesn't trust anyone, think a miserable young guy who's got almost the same personality as him would be interested in trusting him at all?"

"I can answer that." Kicking back, Bakugou crossed his legs on the table. "It's not about trust, but mutual benefits. Deku scratches his

back by telling All For One how to not be shit at life and All For One figures that in return he'll do a favour or so for Deku. The real mystery is what drug he's been on to expect Deku to agree with it."

A long, pulsating silence.

It was a ridiculous idea, but could it be the right one?

All For One made absolutely no logical sense. All For One acted for the benefit of his family, but Midoriya had also stated that All For One's family had died. So how could All For One make his family "happy" when they were all, as far as anyone could tell, deceased? Either someone was lying or a key detail as to what All For One considered family was absent from their deliberations. Outward complaints in front of his colleagues would be unprofessional, so Tenya instead pinched the bridge of his nose.

"Speaking plainly, I don't understand how he's still alive. Midoriya lured All For One to the museum for the sole purpose of scolding him." Tenya adjusted his glasses, wondering what sort of leverage Midoriya have to lure *All For One* of all people anywhere. "By all accounts from Bakugou's observations, All For One facilitated this arrangement in the first place and concurred with Midoriya's assessment. All For One even appears to have invited Bakugou to the location to act as a witness. What does he gain from us knowing about this strange turn of events?"

"I don't think it's a direct benefit, Ida." Tsuyu pushed a wad of papers across the table towards Tenya, who instantly recognised Bakugou's report. "All For One doesn't really gain anything directly, but Midoriya does if he manages to escape. We now know he's alive, coherent and not cooperating with All For One. There's no guilt by association when Midoriya's too ill to resist." Skin and bones, Bakugou had said. Resistance was futile and, as such, Midoriya was being dragged around the countryside by his captor. No awkward questions of complicity during interrogation if he did manage to leave in one piece.

"You mean it's for Midoriya's benefit, not his or ours?" Clicking of bony fingers rolling cross the table. "More cynically, if Midoriya's been championing an assault on All For One's competence, then it's also an opportunity for All For One to show otherwise compared to the... alternative. It also lines up with our suspicions that he's

deliberately ignored opportunities to damage the government." Suspicious indeed, coming from a villain whose supposed goal was to seize control of the government. Apart from causing a tsunami of human and property damage, no such attempt had been made, or at least been noticed.

"What it means is that All For One is avoiding more than physical damage as well," a sleepy voice yawned from the back of the conference room. Detective Tsukauchi's coffee had long since gone cold, dozing as he was on the tucked away lounge. "We keep saying that All For One doesn't have the option of forcing Midoriya, when it might not be the case. What if All For One is electing to not exercise it?"

"Guess he found out the hard way that Deku doesn't have any trouble with maiming himself to take down a villain," Bakugou muttered under his breath.

"Wait, repeat that, Bakugou." Watching the collective blood drain from the gathering wasn't an activity Tenya ever wanted to repeat.

So Bakugou did and Detective Tsukauchi slouched his way over to the table. "You can't leave details like that out in future. That opens up All For One not pressing Midoriya for fear of Midoriya going scorched earth on him. If Midoriya thinks that his death will have a greater benefit than being a prisoner, then All For One's target number one and he doesn't want to be in those crosshairs. All For One wants him alive, not dead. By necessity the attitude has to change."

"All For One's being forced to develop social skills because Midoriya's…" The entire situation made Tenya feel every bit as ill as the news after Kamino.

"Old dogs really can learn new tricks if they're frightened enough. All For One has to play by Midoriya's rules or he'll lose the game with no chance of a rematch."

There was no humour in Detective Yagi's rictus grin. What an unpleasant gentlemen.

All For One motives were unclear, but felt emotionally rooted. Coming from wealth, Momo had more experience than most of her classmates (apart from perhaps Aoyama) when it came to the whims of the financial world. His motives had be to based in feelings over

pragmatism for there to be any degree of consistency in his actions. The finances didn't matter, because no businessmen with any sense would abandon technology, that if snuck in, could be worth trillions in patents. Doctor Garaki was capable of preserving brain function well in exception of the usual three minutes before brain damage was an inevitability. A never seen before and revolutionary technology, never released to the public, because All For One preferred it as a trump card. Unethical to the extreme, but carpet sweeping to conceal the origin of new technologies was phenomenon older than Quirks.

Momo cleared her throat. "The doctor's technology and methodology is priceless as far as a monetary evaluation would cover. That All For One abandoned it in favour of Midoriya suggests to me that money and power were not the main gains in his venture."

"When you say priceless," Kirishima slowly began to ask. "How priceless is priceless to a guy who already has mountains of money?" Across the table, Aoyama snootily rolled his eyes.

A doll in Midoriya's likeness came into being within her hands. Momo was prepared. "All For One wouldn't need to conquer Japan, because the amount of money generated by the sale of the technology would be enough to buy out Japan in totality. Every block of land, every company, every person could be paid out in any number of bribes. An unfathomably large amount of money." Enough money to not only buy the country, but fund it for a long time afterwards. The power for anyone to cheat a traumatic death couldn't be valued with today's currencies. It was an idea from fiction that leapt into and shattered reality.

"So an absolute motherfucking shitload. And he's giving that up in exchange for Midoriya."

"Not what you'd expect from the wannabe demon king," Detective Yagi rumbled. "To be a king you need to be a sovereign and he's given it all away."

"Lines up with what I saw at the museum," Bakugou grunted. "All For One was playing it cool, until the end when Deku tore him a new one for lying about his endgame. Never seen someone so desperate for validation in my entire life. Sure as fuck he's not after money or power, unless it's there to pay people off. Deku hit him hard when he told him piss off and parent instead of being a criminal." Hard enough for All For One to leave, resulting in Bakugou missing vital context for the conversation.

“Then there’s his entire hands off mentality… Our investigations found no trace of All For One’s involvement in Midoriya’s childhood, apart from Inko Midoriya’s visit to the doctor, "Tsubasa" and the Quirk he gave Midoriya.” If he was Midoriya’s long lost father, there’d have been a paper trail at least as old as Midoriya, but nothing had been found. Hisashi Midoriya was a painfully boring individual with an inability to commit to his role as a parent, but he wasn’t a supervillain. “Unlike Shigaraki, All For One played no part in Midoriya’s life up until Shigaraki became active with the League of Villains. Still, within this time period, it was enough for All For One to abandon his operations…” His operations, his technology, his livelihood.

“Deku did tell him to fuck off the criminality if he… wanted to… raise a family…” Bakugou petered out, eyes widening. "Oh shit."

There was a mournful noise to her right and Momo jumped. “A stalker. He’s a full blown stalker.” Detective Tsukauchi erratically waved at Detective Yagi. “I told you from the very beginning of the investigation that All For One was setting off conventional red flags! Fixated Persons needs to be put on this case!” Cracks were spiderwebbing their way along the detective’s now empty coffee cup.

“With what money? If it wasn’t for All Might shoving a fist up the arses of higher ups, we’d be investigating the disappearance of these kids instead, because they sure as hell weren’t going to investigate a lone kid with no prominent family.” Yagi’s lips ferally peeled back, exposing his gleaming white teeth. “Midoriya’s not a priority for the rest of the force. The team we have only agreed to the job because of All Might’s endorsement.” No money, no family, no concern for yet another missing person. How many children disappeared without a trace?

“A stalker? You already fucking knew about him having a stalker?” A wave of outrage echoed around the table.

The detective shrugged and ran his hand through his hair. “Everything about it from the start stunk of typical stalker tendencies. A gut feeling is one thing, but having it supported with evidence is quite another.” Finding the financial evidence that All For One tossed away prospective ownership of an entire country for a teenager who hated him was stranger than fiction. Another flexing of the barrier between it and the real world cracking at the seams.

Momo coughed. “Providing All For One’s not lying.” And that was an

extremely big if, given the person. “I think it’s safe to assume that All For One is taking Midoriya’s advice to heart. His own son might be dead, but that doesn’t mean that a replacement’s impossible. Money can’t buy happiness.” And the technology All For One hid couldn’t resurrect the dead from dust alone. All For One son died decades ago, potentially, well before the technology had been developed. There wasn't a body left to reanimate.

“A replacement,” Yagi faintly repeated, his elbow indenting into the metal table. “To be so desperate, I can’t even imagine.”

All For One. The name had to be his idea of a joke, because everything he’d ever done had been for people who hated and wanted nothing to do with him. Midoriya died due to Momo's mistake, but she wasn’t about to repeat it by leaving him in the hands of All For One.

Not for the first time, the kids had gone above and beyond what anyone expected of them. All Might had asked for their personal assessments of the situation between All For One and Midoriya and they’d delivered to the best of what they had on hand and their ability. Not that any of them knew that Mr Yagi, who they sat before while giving their summation of events, was All Might. Hmm, maybe Bakugou knew, but the rest of them weren’t in on the loop. They were doing extremely well in the face of adversity. Hopefully well enough to feel as though they’d contributed meaningfully, because after what’d happened to Midoriya, there was no way in hell any of them were going anywhere near All Might and All For One. Midoriya’s death had been an accident and there was no real desire for anyone to see All For One using them as hostages during their next brawl.

As far as Shouta’s assessment was concerned, All For One was an extremely dedicated, true to type stalker that had developed a fixation on Midoriya from a young age. Emotional in nature, stemming from the death of his brother due to the Quirk All for One gave him and the death of his son from inferred parental negligence. Money was no object in his desire to retain and possess a fully aware Midoriya. Deprived of his family, All For One was a listless ship slowly sinking into the sea while the water poured into that unfilled hole. Unfortunately for Midoriya, completely unable to fight back, was now the lone bit of cork holding it all together.

They’d assumed from previous intel and briefings that All For One was another dime a dozen psychopath with delusions of grandeur (and he

did little to dispel those impressions). Ruling Japan, world domination blah blah blah, all of the usual supervillain spiel. Their assumption was so far off the mark, it shouldn't have come as a surprise to anyone that All For One had survived being a fugitive for over a century. Their assumption had been missing critical information for just as long, only now with Midoriya was the motivation crystallising into a more coherent set of events.

All For One wasn't after a criminal empire in and of itself. The empire was a grand gesture, a symbol of devotion for him, in line with his Quirk, to give away and be used by another. At first it'd have been his brother, but he died through All for One's own actions. Then it was for his son, who also died because of All For One's negligence. After that, nothing. All Might had already inadvertently proven it, when All For One's criminal enterprise, prior to All Might, had a GDP so large that it was capable of competing with countries. But All For One remained a myth, nowhere to be seen or heard while his underlings went about their business destabilising society. The option had been there the entire time and All For One hadn't pushed the advantage. Didn't have a reason to push the advantage.

Then Midoriya showed up and everything changed. Shigaraki, the League of Villains, Vlad King scurrying around like a rat, Stain and the rest of the hornet's nest that'd been kicked with All For One's newly invigorated arrival on the scene. Now, All For One had incentive, after decades of sitting on his hands. Worst of all, if Monoma was correct, the longevity Quirk taken from the doctor was already inside Midoriya or was about to be given to him. In a sense, Midoriya was replacing the doctor in that All For One would once again have more than a wall to monologue at, even if he wasn't filling the identical role. A Quirk that allowed All For One and the doctor to hold on for a century longer each, now given to a kid who wasn't even slightly interested in self preservation. Even death hadn't been a reprieve for Midoriya and All For One was pulling out all stops to negate it even being an option for escape. Like his brother and son, Midoriya would be the next casualty suffered due to All For One's obsessive personality.

On the upside of this nightmare, the world had become that little bit clearer. On the downside, they'd be prying Midoriya out of All For One's cold, dead, overly attached hands. All For One was playing the long game and Midoriya wasn't being given the choice to opt out.

"So how do we find him?" Tokoyami sat with his arms folded the entire meeting, his shadow pacing behind him.

“Oh, that’s not a problem,” All Might coldly remarked and it made Shouta’s hair stand on end. “We already know exactly where All For One is thanks to Doctor Garaki’s financial records.” There was a particularly shark-like grimace that had Shouta thanking god that none of the students were aware that Yagi and All Might were the same person. “This is just due diligence before we pay him a house call.” For the civility of All Might in his day job, Shouta couldn’t help but wonder if All For One would’ve had less long term success against Mr Yagi than he did against All Might.

A house call at three in the morning, all Quirks blazing with Shouta there waiting in the wings to blink All For One dead. What a great way to spend a school night. All he had to do now was find a babysitter for the kids. One that preferably wasn’t in the employ of All For One.

Chapter End Notes

Three to go!

All For One

Chapter Summary

All for what?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

All good things must come to an end. It was an immutable rule of reality. All peaks had to be followed by a trough. Lows followed highs and so it ebbed and flowed until it eventually came to an end and the line of success rested at the position in which it was left. Inevitable. So how did one measure a subjective line of success after playing the game of life?

Society was an imperfect, fractured mess and produced people who were equally fractured and imperfect. Ideologies built on the lies of the deluded. A government incapable of adjusting to their new meta reality and a society who refused to move with the times. A society that lashed out at its imperfect members, driving them ever deeper into despair and desperation. Simply magnificent for all prior purposes, but recent events were now bringing that well once founded assessment into doubt. Now, there were questions, with one voice in particular chipping away at the founding principles piece by piece.

What if it all could've been avoided? What if, instead of choosing better pieces for the board, that the board itself should have remained unused? What if… the game shouldn't have been played in the first place? Not only because the pieces weren't fit for purpose, but the game itself was poorly chosen for the preferred outcome. Outdated, unreliable, counterproductive and downright deficient for producing consistent results. In fact, upon review, it hadn't generated any winning results for the full length of the match. Thus, it had to be asked, was it still worth playing another round? The answer could only be no, it wasn't worth it and through shoddy logic, perhaps hadn't even been worth playing in the first place.

Lifetimes worth of choices rendered meaningless by the casual conversation and analysis of a child. A child who'd been accessible and public with his views for the full duration of the boy's lifespan. A child who could've been asked these same questions at age five and still provided the same level of quality response. A child, who was

watched for years without intervention, because nothing about the living situation warranted intervention. Not at that point in time, at least. Or so was thought… In hindsight, the red flags were merrily waving for years prior and were ignored in favour of a more comfortable truth. A more palatable and digestible form of reality instead of acknowledging the material circumstances in which Izuku Midoriya lived.

The mistakes made in relation to Izuku Midoriya had been a lifespan long pattern of dominoes. With each moment of blissful ignorance, another segment of the formation collapsed; tile by tile toppled and the resulting formation had etched itself into the boy's psyche forever. There were no tiles left to fall. No game left to play. Every single domino had been resting in place for a decade before anyone deigned to check and only then found the tiles forevermore embedded into the play area. Too little. Too slow. Too late. Too inattentive. It happened too fast. For such a long life, the decades skipped by in nearly an instant, in spite of all the effort and the keyframes of the Izuku Midoriya's tiles erupting and falling to the earth shot by in fast-forward.

Fatalities on not one, but two occasions. Twice Izuku Midoriya died and twice was carefully reassembled back into the world of the living. Two deaths and resurrections too many. Two entirely preventable deaths, if only there was an earlier intervention. Red flags billowing in black winds for years and, in spite of all of the calls to action received, had been ignored because that had always been the standard practice. But why was it standard practice? How is that every single one of the copious warning signs, seen by so many differing sets of eyes, had failed to raise the alarm? It could only be the oldest of problems relating to human capital management rearing its ugly head once more and needing to be addressed once more.

Long gone were the days where the help could be trusted with innovation or an independent thought of their own. Instead, corpses had been repurposed and reanimated into the Noumu so even the very option of counteracting orders would be nullified. One act of disobedience at the right time, on the right day and decades of planning would unravel in an instant. The consequences of which would be dire… Had already been dire enough to warrant the change in policy in the first place. From the very onset of Quirks, there were those driven by base desires. Both frustrating and reassuring that humanity had changed so little in recent decades; the understanding did little to provide a solution to human capital that was incapable of adequately observing and reporting problem areas. Too absorbed in

ego to assess data and allocate the requisite amount of importance to actionable reports. That problem, was precisely why the Noumu had been created in the first place, but now the point was moot with the very same dilemma striking yet again and yet again resulting in death.

In turn, it had also informed the selection of source material for the Noumu. When society's criminals were now more instinctive Quirk drive than they were human beings, of what objective loss were they to this society who cried over spoilt wine they never had any intention of drinking? All of the subjects had practically volunteered for their fate. Unnoticed, unwanted and not a single government official would muster their meagre resources to search for them, when they had more pressing matters than the disappearance of an inconvenient criminal. Criminals that, even while heavily modified, still failed in the most important and delicate of tasks and had done so repeatedly in spite of the assurances.

But if… what if… the counter advice had been correct? What if the approach had always been flawed for the reasons stated by Izuku Midoriya? What if the repeated failures had always stemmed from entrusting the most important of tasks to untalented lessers? What if Izuku Midoriya was right in his assessment? The world tilted on its axis, for reality itself buckled under the weight of such a revelation. What a waste. Time. Money. Goodwill. Lives. All lost to what? For a dream that was stillborn on arrival, because the strategy had never been fit for purpose. Time marched onwards, yet progress on the most worthy of projects had been repeatedly destroyed by this oversight. Decades upon decades of work invalidated in an instant by a child. Exhilarating. Crippling. Enlightening in ways previously unseen and unexposed by the whispers of sycophants.

In spite of the methodology falling to pieces, there was one shining light left to follow on the horizon. That same nugget of knowledge, which had so ruthlessly uprooted over a century of modus operandi, had suggested an alternative path. A path not so much less travelled, as one not travelled at all for well over a hundred years. Abandoned to disuse, the dirt was potholed, encircled by briars, pitfalls and wild animals. Utterly inhospitable, a near certain death trap, but a way through nonetheless. Up until now, it wouldn't have been set for consideration, but the circumstances and context surrounding its usage had changed forever. It might need clearance, but this path, unlike the previous path, drew a clear line between origin and destination. Time. Money. Goodwill. This go around, a new approach would be taken and strict consultations would be followed.

Hubris. It could only be hubris for such a long period of time to pass before the flaws were assessed and later remedied. It was unacceptable for such sabotage to have occurred in the first place. Izuku Midoriya had a bright, wonderful and long lived future ahead of him. Had. While the potential was there, a damaged husk with no regard for self preservation required careful cultivation to regain that lost shine. If only Izuku Midoriya could be helped, step by step, across the line.

All good things must come to an end. And for that to happen, the loose ends had to be neatly tied up before Izuku Midoriya tripped over them while following this newly refurbished path.

All For One had a different warping Quirk. They hadn't visited the doctor at any point during the trip and while it had taken Izuku longer than he would've liked to pick away at the newest… quirks of the Quirk, it was still clearly a different Quirk. No mist, no ooze, but instead All For One seeming to pull in on himself before materialising elsewhere. Days of All For One blinking around without any of his previous restrictions had solidified Izuku's conclusion. Days of near silence with All For One simultaneously within physical reach, but lost to the world in general, while he flittered around in a buzz of activity. It smelt like a scheme.

"You mean it don't you? What you said about my brother and son?" All For One was digging around in a drawer. "That me being present would've changed their deaths?" Provided All For One didn't kill them in a fit of rage or Quirk influenced psychosis, Izuku could only assume that at least mentally they'd have been better off with All For One not being a career criminal. Not having met All For One before he was All For One, Izuku couldn't begin to imagine him as a person capable of sitting still long enough to read comics. Whether his absence was an improvement or not wasn't something Izuku could assess with the present All For One.

"In theory," Izuku slowly started, leaning on what was left of a table. "Your one job as a parent, at least, was to raise your son. It was to be there in the first place, especially if his mother wasn't up for the task. It wasn't to run off and start a criminal cabal, it was to teach him how to reach adulthood without falling into every single pitfall you did on your way to…" Izuku waved a hand generally. "I don't want to call you an adult, because Bakugou's more mature than you," Izuku bluntly explained, coolly watching the back of All For One's head

flinch. “And guess what? You weren’t there. You didn’t manage the most basic part of parenting and his death is entirely on you whether you physically did the deed or not.” Pausing, Izuku leaned forwards. “Would he have been where he was on the day he died if you were there to stop him?”

Hesitation. “No, I wouldn’t have allowed it.” Izuku could have an educated guess at the exact means that would’ve been used to facilitate it as well. “Would you have been at Kamino if your parents intervened?” That… was a tough one.

“You’re operating under the assumption that either of my parents cared enough to ask about where I was or why I didn’t make it home from the hospital.” Izuku’s mum hadn’t asked for the details. She never had, ever since the diagnosis, whether it was him going to a museum or elsewhere. Izuku went about his life and she went about hers, with minimal interest or overlap in Izuku’s affairs. “But that doesn’t matter.” Shaking his head, Izuku sharply pointed at him with a knife shaped hand.

“It matters for my frame of reference,” All For One butted in. “Even if your parents disapproved, you still would have gone, wouldn’t you?”

“Parents disapprove because of their personal preferences, not because they actually care about your wellbeing.” Wasn’t it… wasn’t it obvious? “Mum never asked, because she didn’t care enough to fake support or approval. She wanted me to give up…” Izuku clenched his fist. “But she wasn’t brave enough to say the words herself. So…” He went anyway, because Izuku wasn’t an extension of his parents. Maybe they could sit there in silence and watch things unfold, but Izuku couldn’t handle it while knowing he had the ability to do something. Do *anything*. "Maybe if it was All Might I'd have cared more, because All Might was almost always there and... they weren't there at all. Physically or otherwise."

“You stopped speaking to her about it all,” All For One murmured, turning to face Izuku with a Quirk diary in hand. “Because she didn’t express any support or interest in your goals or dreams, she lost both your respect and the privilege of being informed about said goals and dreams.” There was a giddiness to All For One that made Izuku’s scalp itch. “You stopped trusting her… because she wasn’t there emotionally, even if she was physically present in a nominal sense.” A toddler putting together their first puzzle. It was all Izuku could visualise. "My son was the same as you. He cared about the pro heroes more than he ever did me because they were there for him and... I

wasn't..." All For One finished in a small voice, blinking rapidly while rolling his wrists, book still loosely held in hand.

“It’s taken you over a century to get there,” Izuku snidely remarked as All For One thumbed through Volume One. “But you got there eventually. Mum wasn’t emotionally present. Dad, or more accurately, my male gene donor because he’s never done any parenting, wasn’t there at all. When people aren’t interested in helping you after they bring you into the world, I don’t think they deserve to know if I make a choice that might involve me leaving it.” Because they’d already done their part and at this point would have no influence in Izuku doing his part. Their chance was long gone.

All For One met Izuku’s eyes, the haze that hovered about his face still firmly in place. Gaze fixed? It was instinct that allowed Izuku to catch that minuscule shift. “And that’s why you died. Because they…”

“At that point, they have no input,” Izuku confirmed, taking another step back as All For One approached. “Use it or it lose it. Kinda like how you treat most people’s Quirks, but relationships instead. If they’re not interested now…”

“Then they won’t miss you when you’re gone,” All For One concluded, hands clawing. “Was that really the last thing that went through your head?” Eyes narrowing, All For One’s ever approaching steps had Izuku retreat in a near quickstep.

“Everyday for over a decade,” came out far more apathetically than Izuku intended. “It’s not paranoia when they’re really out to get you,” Izuku tacked on, scratching his head. “I mean… I wasn’t wrong, was I? Mum cried… but she did that before I died, as well.” Shrugging, Izuku carried on. “It’s school that was the surprise. I really didn’t expect a memorial.” And still didn’t know how to deal with those implications either. While Izuku appreciated the sentiment, all of them apart from him had large, mostly loving families to go back to at the end of the day. In the toss up between him and them, he was still the logical choice. Izuku didn't have those same obligations.

“You don’t expect anything from anyone, because they never provide anything that aligns with your *real* desires,” All For One breathed, snapping the book shut. “It makes so much sense. Why didn’t I do this years ago? What’s wrong with me?” More than could ever be quantified in words.

“Do what?” Izuku’s eyes narrowed.

Silence. Izuku grit his teeth. All For One was that little bit closer. Too close.

“Do what?” Izuku repeated more insistently, finding his step back blocked by a skirting board. Uh oh. If he could leg it to the windo-

-All For One moved and Izuku was dragged into his arms with a cry.

“Hey! Let go!” One For All was called-

-Seized. Izuku froze, unable to so much as twitch as All For One’s Paralysis Quirk came into effect, with One For All fading into inactivity with a noise of intense internal disgruntlement.

“There’s no need to panic, Izuku,” All For One crooned and Izuku instantly tried to shove at him. His limbs refused to cooperate and he couldn’t speak. Protests dying on stiff lips. “We’ve got all the time in the world to work out the details. I’ll see you very soon, hmm?” Like a bird about to roost, All For One snuggled into him and Izuku’s vision faded. “You’re such a good boy.”

Being plunged into One For All’s mindscape upon contact was expected, because of course there was a scheme and of course Izuku wasn’t meant to have any awareness when it went down. All For One’s expression of immediate outrage upon arrival, on the other hand, wasn’t expected.

“Look at this,” the Quirk snarled. “Look at his gift.” All For One touched his own temple and ripped out a writhing shadowy mass of a short, but familiar silhouette. No detail, no face, no voice as All For One manhandled his newest, involuntary acquisition. He threw it to the ground with a solid thud and a cloud of dust. Listening closely, Izuku could hear a pained whimper echo in the darkness.

“Is that…” Izuku squinted. A balding head? Maybe glasses?… The coat that flared as All For One shoved it away. “Is that the doctor’s Quirk?” Fingers of cold caressed Izuku’s spine. “How is this a gift?” The same doctor who tried to convince Izuku to end it all… and in all fairness, had All For One been seconds slower, it would’ve worked as well. Just not the way the doctor intended. That didn’t stop Izuku himself from taking an extremely large step back away from… it.

“That’s what I want to know. How is this an appropriate gift, considering who and what it embodies?” The Quirk slashed the air

with a hand. “Why would you want to have the shade of him in your head? Even if it lacks the composition required to have any impact on your behaviour, it’s still tainted by association.” Still an echo of the doctor who desperately wanted Izuku to die, so he could resume his work for his employer. The doctor Izuku hadn’t seen since the museum trip… This was making more sense by the second.

“Why doesn’t he understand that, though? You’re the same person, right?” How could there still be so much separation when they were still the same entity? Although, this incarnation of All For One exhibited far more restraint and humanity than the part of that actually occupied the original body. Was it possible that all of the other shades absorbed by the Quirk had rubbed off onto the original occupant? Had All For One been twisted by its exposure to all of the other far more socially adept Quirks he’d absorbed over the years? Was All For One really All For One or had it truly become One For All? Without more contact, it was impossible to know for sure. In a couple of decades Izuku might have the answer, if he lived that long.

“We *were* the same person. Unlike him, I have access to the unfiltered Izuku Midoriya and this,” he hurled the doctor’s Quirk away again with contempt. “You don’t want any part or component of this lackey, even if it is a lesser imprint.”

“Then it’s as simple as giving it back to him, isn’t it?” Izuku did have his own variation of the Quirk... Right? Easy enough to fix. Giving the Quirk back solved the problem. But then again, this was All For One. It was ever that easy.

“There’s more. This Quirk has no inertia,” All For One wrapped his fingers around Izuku’s wrist and pulled his hand over to probe the ball of shadows. All it succeeded in doing was making Izuku feel like throwing up after he was hit with a surge of… something. A sense of profound persistence that sank into his bones. “Without it, the doctor’s age will rapidly advance to what it should be without the Quirk.” But that meant-

“-Won’t he instantly die?” If All For One was over a hundred, but still maintained a relatively youthful age… Then the doctor had to be around the same age. Without the Quirk…

“Yes, and that’s the real “gift” here. The Quirk is proof of the doctor’s demise.” With another sharp flick, All For One tossed the Quirk away yet again. “Until you’re awake enough to offload it onto a deserving candidate, we’re stuck with this sad attempt at an apology.”

“I can’t give it back to the doctor, because he killed the doctor by taking away the Quirk.” Izuku swayed on his mental feet. “It’s the slow and agonising death that’s the real apology with this the as proof that he’s serious about it.” How much money had been flushed down the toilet with his chief scientist no longer in the picture? Enough to have Izuku panning around for a way out of the mindscape.

“Naturally. This is my other self we’re talking about.” An almost apologetic shrug. "It's what we do. Give and take. Giving tends to have more strings attached." Puppet strings more like, with the disproportionate demands All For One would make about Quirks.

“So if you were him and you are him… what would you do about this entire situation now that your right hand associate is gone?” Not that the two entities were fully in sync after all these years apart. Insight was better than no insight at all.

“Oh, that’s simple.” The Quirk flared his hands and grinned. “I wouldn’t leave. It was always the only acceptable answer. How it’s required this long for him to find the answer, when I worked it out decades ago, is living proof that we’re not the same being anymore.”

That… really didn’t help.

Aizawa was leaving them with babysitters. Katsuki didn’t blame him in the slightest after what happened to Deku. Kamino had been the worst case scenario, so them being assigned dedicated sitters while All Might went and crammed All For One’s teeth up the bastard’s own arse was an understandable, if fucking annoying, part of their plan. This time all teaching staff, including Aizawa were fully on deck for anything that freak pulled and to extract Deku. This time, there weren’t any rogue students floating around to be whack-a-moled by falling debris. Didn’t take a rocket surgeon with a law degree to understand that Aizawa wasn’t going to handle that a second time (or third, as Endeavor Junior speculated from the amount of booze he’d spotted in the teacher’s common area).

There they were - Gentle Criminal and La Brava, in full civilian dress, bounding towards them from the entrance of Gran Torino’s apartment. “Hello, students! Welcome, welcome!” La Brava was bouncing up and down, waving a signboard with *WELCOME UA STUDENTS!!!* plastered on it in big, bold print. Peak embarrassment for anyone dumb enough to care about that shit at this time of afternoon.

Gentle Criminal was just behind her and also rose a hand, while he cradled his cup of tea with the other. “Hello, students! This way!”

They were being babysat by villains. Background checks must be in full swing if these two were the deemed the best people for the job by All Might. Gran Torino as well was busy assisting with the tooth to arse shoving ratio, so he was down for the count as well. The pro heroes and police must be fucking infested with All For One’s patsies, if a set of criminals were now a better fit for the job than UA’s own auxiliary staff.

“How the hell did you two get roped into this?” Katsuki spoke out the side of his mouth as he passed by Gentle at the back of the pack.

“Mr Yagi strongly *recommended* our involvement in this extracurricular activity,” Gentle answered after a mouthful of tea. “You know us by now. If All Might or Mr Yagi tell us to jump, the questions are how high and who are we landing on? We’ve already been screened and have no link whatsoever to All For One. Overall, your teachers and Mr Yagi are fine with us providing an out of hours, off the cuff, peek into the history of the hero system and associated villains.” The criminal flourished, splashing himself with tea like a drunk carrying his ninth jug of beer through a university bar.

“That’s fucking brave of them. Didn’t think the government liked this subject matter being covered.” And the people who did it copped sharp disciplinary action and threats of suspension. Those who weren’t pro, Katsuki couldn’t say. No one on Hero Tube had been popular enough to incur their wrath, but that was because pro hero accounts and recordings of fights ate most of the viewership. Didn’t need to care about education when the algorithm felt like it was designed to smother all traces of intelligent discussion that went longer than fifteen minutes. The government got that censorship service for free.

“Good thing this counts as a class excursion then. We would’ve done it in the Tokyo National Museum, but it's currently a crime scene and not open for the public,” La Brava chirped and Katsuki’s hand sparked as the memory jumped back into his mind. Fucking All For One being manhandled by Deku and being over the moon about it had Katsuki’s left eye twitching to the point that Gentle was leaning away.

“Sorry, force of habit. Yeah, I saw that, the inconsiderate bastard.” Even if the museum had been Deku’s idea, it was All For One who went out of his way to notify Katsuki. All For One was why the museum itself was now the source of a historical event.

“It’s fine. We can do the presentation here, anyway.” None of them knew what to expect going into it, but the projector and seating that now dominated Gran Torino’s apartment hadn’t been one of their guesses.

“Movie night?” Kaminari asked.

“Documentary night,” La Brava sang back, pirouetting. “We’ve made so much material for you~” She sang and Katsuki had the impression of a bird cheeping delicately, right before it fell out of the air and swooped a poor bastard going by on his bicycle.

Their expectations weren’t much of anything really. Everyone thought it was a busywork night to keep them out of pro hero hair come the night of the raid. Whatever they’d expected from “documentary night”, the wall to wall witness recounts and data crammed into each frame about the changing phases of the criminal underworld’s leadership hadn’t been among them. Like Ponytail suggested, for a villain who dominated Japan, All Might’s actual impact on All For One’s level of exerted influence was close to zero. All For One had never openly attempted a government takeover in all of his years. In depth, almost evasive and with data that was never available to the public. All Might had been pulling big boy strings behind the scenes to get them access to real numbers instead of the shit they were feeding to the rank and file and general public. If this documentary ever made it to the public, the government would be trying to paddle up a Niagra Falls grade shit waterfall without a paddle.

There was a gentle tug on the back of Katsuki’s shirt that had him leap a foot into the air. “Bakugou, you have a visitor.” La Brava's disgustingly cheery face wasn’t all that disgustingly cheery. “Sir Nighteye is here to see you.” What the fuck? What happened to the restraining order?

“That charming fellow at the press conference,” Gentle helpfully added. “And it does appear to be him rather than any imposter.” Gentle leaned in to whisper in Katsuki’s ear. “The conceit and arrogance is the same as said press conference, so we’ll be just around the corner. I’ve set up some… safeguards in case he tries anything,” Gentle winked. “That is, of course, if you want to speak to him, because there’s nothing wrong with you denying his request.” Tempting.

“Nah, I’ll see what he wants.” If only to throw him to the police for breaching the restraining order.

There he was standing just outside the main door to the building, glasses glinting, eyes averted. “Bakugou.” Sir Nighteye’s eyes were averted, his face turned to the side, tone of voice mild and he was pale. As if he’d not just seen a ghost, but was on the verge of joining them… This was Sir Nighteye. He was a desk jockey, he didn’t do a huge amount of field work.

“What the fuck do you want?” Katsuki snapped. “I’m missing movie night for this shit. Be quick and piss off.” Gentle and La Brava put a lot of effort into their presentation and if All Might wanted them all to sit through it, then Katsuki wasn’t going to disregard those expectations.

“The Symbol of Peace wasn’t responsible for the success of the investigation into Izuku Midoriya’s disappearance,” Sir Nighteye uttered under his breath and Katsuki leaned over. “I would like to apologise for the comments I made about you, Izuku Midoriya and everyone else involved in this tragic incident caused by All For One.” What. The. *Fuck*.

“What was that, Shithead? Speak up.” Nah, this wasn’t fucking right. Sir Nighteye bum-rushed All Might at a press conference over a phone block. An apology now? Why? Sir Nighteye wasn’t included in their investigation for reasons apparent to the three blind mice, so where had this come from? None of them cared or had enough time to prompt any soul searching. Sir Nighteye would deal with that bullshit in his own time.

“I was wrong and you were both right.” Sir Nighteye valiantly avoided eye contact. Vindication was almost as sweet as cracking in the faces of villains. This prick rocking from side to side, as if he was being buffeted by a fuck off huge albatross, was not vindication. It was disturbing. From the footsteps padding up behind him, he wasn’t the only one calling bullshit here.

“Huh, that’s a big change of heart you’re having there, Sir Nighteye,” Katsuki squinted at him. “Where’d this come from? From causing a scene in public, to losing your teaching licence, to this meeting now. What the hell happened?” Rocking on his heels, any impression of Sir Nighteye having his shit together firmly flew out the window. All of the colour was draining from his face.

“All For One happened,” Sir Nighteye whimpered and his legs fell out from under him.

Katsuki exploded forwards into a dive. Hands outreached, lunging. Contact. Katsuki got his hands around the smug bastard's head and together they fell. Gentle Criminal and La Brava were there a split second later, Sir Nighteye and Katsuki bouncing off a cushion of thin air.

Made it.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. It won't happen again." Sir Nighteye heaved, gasping for air. "Please. I didn't know. I didn't-" He was choking for air and all Katsuki could do was frantically mash 119 into his phone, while Gentle took over keeping Sir Nighteye from faceplanting into the concrete.

All For fucking One, at it again. All For One who had to be watching all of this shit go down from a distance if he paid Sir Nighteye a visit; an arsehole who previously escaped All For One's expert proctological examination, despite his association with All Might. If this is what he did to Sir Nighteye… why the *fuck* had they left Inko Midoriya on her own on the night of the raid?

All For One, whole, hale and unfortunately hearty, wasn't even watching when Toshinori came crashing in through the mirrored glass of his skyscraper. Nor was he fazed by the flood of sleeping gas, express delivery courtesy of Midnight. Instead he inhaled deeply in conjunction with a sip of his wine. Contentedness was etched into every line of All For One's shadowy face and Toshinori's blood pressure soared.

"Somnambulist, huh? I'll have to let Izuku Midoriya know that he was right about your entrance strategy," All For One almost dreamily commented through the haze. As if he was going to be leaving in one piece. "Ah, yes and next it will be…" All For One precisely flicked the glass out the window, leaned sideways and vanished deeper into the gas. "That'll be Eraserhead seeking to Erase my Quirks," he tutted. "Playing dirty, All Might. You're meant to be the hero of this story! I never would've guessed that these cheap tricks of yours came from Izuku Midoriya." That wasn't mockery. *It wasn't mockery*. Far too... *fond* to be All For One digging into young Midoriya. Far too familiar.

Toshinori didn't dignify the comment with more than a snarl from behind his gas mask, taking off after All For One into the voluminous mist. A lunge. Fingers brushed past fabric. Another grab rewarded him

with a few strands of white hair and a hiss. That'll serve the bastard right.

All For One clicked his tongue. “I could poison you of course, One For All provides no natural immunity to those biological processes. Or what’s left of it at least,” he leered. A block, followed by a click of digits that shunted Toshinori backwards. “You can’t defend yourself in your sleep either,” was added as an afterthought. “So many options! You really know how to pick them! Izuku Midoriya pulled your entire strategy apart, with nothing to go on but his prior knowledge. You must be very proud. He’s *far* better than Tomura.” Footsteps and a surge of heat that echoed Toshinori’s mood. Endeavor was here as an additional motivational device. Flames on nearly all sides, Aizawa's deadly sight waiting just beyond those and the gang of pro heroes eager to pile drive All For One should he emerge from the building. All For One with Search knew exactly what was waiting for him should he set a toe outside of the building...But All For One wanted Toshinori in person and set out Katsuki Bakugou and Izuku Midoriya as the juicy bait hanging from the hook. If it was anything like Kamino, All For One didn't want an audience and every measure was designed to reinforce the wisdom in that approach. Toshinori didn't want an audience for this chat *either*, but nor was he stupid enough to turn up expecting All For One not make at least one murder attempt. There was a plan... even if young Midoriya had guessed *most* of it.

“Where is Izuku Midoriya?” Toshinori snapped, swiping again. All For One was a lot faster than Kamino. That previous lethargy disappeared into the same place that Toshinori wanted to shove All For One's teeth. But... he could still warp and that alone was always going to be the main problem. Surrounded on all sides, All For One was more likely to flee than risk capture, but if Toshinori could get All For One to drag him along for the trip... That had been accounted for by the plan. Knowledge was power and knowledge was sorely lacking in the case of All For One the Stalker, as opposed to All For One Criminal Mastermind.

“Not here.” As expected, considering the circumstances. Deeper and deeper they moved into the structure. The entire floor was empty, as if every room had been stripped. All For One had been waiting for them the entire time. It was a trap, of course it was and young Bakugou had been the final lure. All For One wanted to be found, but why? “There’s no need for either of us to drop another building on him.” Red. All he could see was red.

“Where?” A shockwave that forced All For One to duck. The wall

behind him dematerialised. “Is.” Toshinori cleaved straight through a supporting pillar on his way to his target. “He?” Tendrils tugged at Toshinori’s wrist, pulling him off course. Regaining his footing, Toshinori wrenched at them, but All For One disengaged, the black spikes withdrawing even as Toshinori lurched forwards again, slamming another pillar that crumbled into dust.

“You really are trying to kill me this time, aren’t you?” All For One cracked his neck as the building above them groaned. “Once wasn’t enough, was it?” All For One was one of the few people who could endlessly die at Toshinori’s hands and it would never be enough for what happened to young Midoriya.

“You killed my student!” Toshinori pounded the floor, a spray of debris hurtling through the air towards All For One who flickered through the fatal cloud. “Do you have any idea what it feels like to be crushed alive under a skyscraper?” To be buried in concrete dust, to spend his last moments choking to death on shards of powered glass because of *this* worthless bastard.

All For One’s eyes widened, but it was too late. Toshinori aimed past All For One and across the floor, the third pillar snapped and four storeys above immediately began to fall.

BOOM.

This wasn’t a controlled demolition. Toshinori latched onto All For One by the shoulder and bodily hoisted him further into the building’s centre, racing against gravity. Toshinori would walk away from the impact, but All For One for all of his regeneration was still the shoddy electric potato masher that Bakugou had mentioned. With enough strain, it would fail. All For One had to be alive, but nothing said he had to be in one piece for the plan to work.

Twangs as metal snapped like twine.

All For One’s eyes narrowed, while he struggled to free himself from Toshinori’s vice grip. Bones gave under it and All For One’s retaliatory pressure blast dislodged but failed to launch Toshinori. Weaker than it should’ve been. All For One was holding back. Instead, Toshinori staggered a few metres back onto the buckling floor.

“Ouch, you broke ribs there,” as if the building wasn’t about to pancake on top of them. “Were you trying to puncture my lungs?” An… *annoyed* cough? No concern whatsoever.

“WHERE IS HE!?” Toshinori roared, hurtling in with a lariat that would decapitate if it landed.

Instead of a deflection, All For One blocked, black tendrils hooking Toshinori’s arm and reeling him in closer spite of heels being dragged through concrete and glass. Locked in All For One’s grip, the bastard leaned over and murmured below average hearing, beneath the roar of the death from above, death from below and the flames outside of their improvised coffin. “While I’m more than happy to put on a show for your colleagues, All Might, there are unresolved matters for us to discuss before either of us leave this mortal coil.”

“Like what?” Toshinori growled, winding up for another punch with his free arm.

“Like the status of Izuku Midoriya,” All For One chuckled and Toshinori felt his entire being twist.

Sound. Darkness. Gone.

Success.

Chapter End Notes

Two to go.

For You

Chapter Summary

Anything. Everything.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

If Izuku wasn't awake, yet he hadn't slept, then the range of options for why he was currently back in his bedroom were rapidly dwindling. It was unquestionably his room. Untouched from before Kamino. Every book and nicknack still in place exactly as he left it before the ill-fated rescue mission to Kamino. Exactly the same… apart from one little detail.

"Why All Might?" All For One was perched at the end of Izuku's bed, scanning Izuku's collection of books with mild interest. If there was ever a sign that Suspended Animation was at work, it was this one. This wasn't Izuku's room. This was All For One's *memory* of Izuku's room, before he'd raided its contents. But… which All For One? "Why of all people did you choose him? So many pro heroes, a veritable buffet on offer, but you choose the one that held One For All." Not One For All then. This was the Quirk that lurked within the person itself.

"Why not?" Maybe there should've been some effort to sit up, but they weren't in a real place or even real people at this point in time. Manners were a luxury that didn't apply in purgatory. "No one could ever compete with him."

"In what regard?" The Quirk shuffled to face Izuku.

"In everything," Izuku bluntly answered. "Minimal injuries sustained during rescues, minimal injuries sustained during arrests, mitigation of property damage, non-existent critical incident reports, high tier public relations skills and…" Izuku trailed off. "His Quirk was also mystery that I really wanted to solve." That was still very much a work in progress even after taking possession of the Quirk. Speaking to a Quirk didn't help when it was just as capable of lying as the originating source. "If you weren't you and had social skills and weren't a blight on society, it might've even been you if you dedicated the same amount of effort to not being a waste of oxygen." Quite

literally, before he regenerated. “Your Quirk is great, but you as an entity… The entire mass murderer evil overlord thing just doesn’t do it for me or ninety-five percent of the population.” All For One would always be All For One at this rate. With over a hundred years to make a better choice, it was time the man hadn’t used positively. It was extremely unlikely that it’d change during Izuku’s new and hypothetically much prolonged lifespan.

“It wasn’t just the Quirk.” Realisation was marching across the phantom’s face. Obvious to anyone else, but draped in mystery for an entity who traded in Quirks. An entity who was himself a Quirk.

“It’s never just the Quirk,” Izuku confirmed. “Every Quirk has a person attached to that Quirk if the combined parcel produces an…” Word selection was important here, because Izuku’s problem with All For One wasn’t even that he was a criminal. “Unstable, inconsistent threat to others that has no self awareness and no desire to change the behaviour,” Izuku settled on and patted himself on the back. It wasn’t just All For One being described here, after all. “You can’t trust someone in the loosest sense if they’re never present, if they do nothing when they are present and they only ever act in their own direct interest.” Izuku didn’t think he was asking for much from others, but it was a bar they repeatedly failed to clear. “That’s the reason above any discussion of pro heroes or villains, because it’s not about the labels and it’s never been about the labels for me. Heroes aren’t heroes if they aren’t helping people. Villains aren’t villains if what’s happening is beyond their control and they don’t intend to hurt anyone. And parents can’t call themselves parents if they don’t do any parenting,” Izuku pointedly narrowed his eyes at All For One who had the self awareness to break eye contact. “It’s about who they *are as people*, not what they’re called and that transcends Quirks.”

“And that is why you chose All Might over your parents.” All For One reached over and clutched at Izuku’s hand through the blanket.

“All Might was always there, always someone you could rely on regardless of it being a catastrophic disaster or general life advice.” Apart from that first meeting… and even now Izuku had to wonder who he’d been talking to with the sudden change of mind that followed. “He was present and he was more reliable than anyone else. I didn’t expect any personal attention, because I’m not Shigaraki, but he was a constant compared to the people who weren’t there physically or emotionally. Their concerns were skin deep at best and malice disguised as worry at worst.” The friends Izuku didn’t have and his mother’s lack of interest that only grew with Izuku’s age. No

engagement. No interest. Plenty of concern, but it was never acted on even with the injuries. Not a single person was incapable of letting him down and even now that hadn't really changed.

"It sounds like you're describing me." The Quirk folded his hands.

"It describes you, yeah… but it also describes my parents, my classmates, my teachers and every other person I've ever met even with the non-criminals. All Might might be the best of them, but that's not hard to do when he's the only one who turned up in the first place." All Might won by default, because there was no one else in the running. "You might be here, but you're… also you and there's room for improvement." All For One who did nothing while his brother and son died. All For One who now spent Izuku's every waking moment hovering, so unlike what the man himself described in his previous interactions.

There was a smirk in response. "Have I at least been helpful?"

"You killed me, brought me back from the dead, kidnapped me, experimented on me, gave me Quirks I didn't want and…" Izuku frowned and counted on his mental tally. "Still have shown more interest in my career and hobbies in that time period than mum has for the previous twelve years." There was a pregnant pause. "And I really don't understand why you've gone to so much effort when I'm not even a blood relative. I just wish that the murder, necromancy, kidnapping, experimentation and involuntary Quirks weren't the prelude to the latter."

"But apart from that?" All For One perked up and Izuku rolled his eyes.

"I guess you've been helpful apart from that and all of the serial killing," Izuku grudgingly admitted, recounting their many informative conversations. "Although, you could've have avoided all of that in the first place if you played dead the first time All Might killed you. You could've walked away at any point in time. Nothing's stopping you now either." But if he had, Izuku would've been nine years old and dealing with a far less restrained All For One, who had far less of a guilty conscience.

Mid blink, Izuku missed the lunge and was immediately enveloped by All For One and smooshed face first into his chest. All Izuku could do was free an arm and awkwardly pat the Quirk on the shoulder in an attempt to ease the pressure.

“It’s been such a long time… but you’ll always be mine, you know. You can *always* ask me for help and I’ll give it to the best of my ability. No strings attached.” With all of the caveats that asking the Quirk for help entailed. This being wasn’t the whole person, but a fragment that’d been driving the body for over a century. It was a nice thought, but it’d only ever be a thought.

That All For One made asking for help sound so natural, even while he pinned Izuku to him with one arm, didn’t escape his notice and once again the world shifted.

Being dragged into the warp wasn’t nearly as painful as the landing. Toshinori felt his bones groan in protest as they landed, both of them kicking off backwards away from each other.

“Here we are, where it all began,” All For One uttered, eyes focused on a point over Toshinori’s shoulder, before his eyes narrowed. “A tracking device? You won’t be needing that for our friendly chat.” Sparks leapt from All For One’s fingertips and an untold numbers of Toshinori’s trackers disintegrated. Of course he brought more than one, but being zapped left their status unreliable. Instead, Toshinori grimaced and snarled at his opponent. There were other ways of tracking this bastard.

“Shall we commence the guided tour?” All For One’s toothy grin was invitation enough for Toshinori to uproot and sling the nearest azalea at him with intense prejudice. Unfazed, All For One leaned away, allowing it pass him by.

“This is-,” Toshinori’s eyes shot around. A house. A perfectly ordinary (unoccupied? Toshinori hoped to god it was unoccupied) house in a vaguely traditional style. From a quick glance down the street, it was an upmarket neighbourhood. “Where are we? Where’s young Midoriya?”

“This where he used to live, before he and his mother moved. As for Izuku Midoriya… All in good time.” All For One was leaning against a brick wall, as if a shrub hadn’t missed him by an inch. “The property was never sold, by the way. Still held by Hisashi Midoriya, as if there was the slightest chance his son would ever have him, but after the diagnosis it was determined that a location closer to other people would more greatly benefit their ailing son.” They should’ve listened to Tsukauchi in the first place. Of all of the theories, his was still the

most applicable to All For One's motivations with Midoriya.

"Ailing?" Halting in his tracks, because All For One himself seemed more than content enough to take a break. "What ailment? There was nothing wrong with young Midoriya." Quirklessness wasn't a disease. Who was spreading around this nonsense?

"Of course there wasn't anything wrong with him." That almost sounded bitter to Toshinori's ears. "But he was diagnosed as being Quirkless, as if being Quirkless wasn't the regular status of humanity for tens of thousands of years and that was end of any goodwill for Izuku Midoriya." Hisashi Midoriya had to be loaded to have a house this nice and still keep a separate apartment for his wife. A mountain of money, but still totally absent from any of Toshinori's parent teacher interactions, even after the boy's death. Suspicious to a ridiculous degree, but it wasn't urgent enough to divert resources from finding young Midoriya.

"Any hopes of Hisashi Midoriya of having a family were dashed in this very house," All For One explained. "He and his wife failed to reassure their son and his trust in them was shattered in an instant." The hostility from moments earlier had vanished into the air. Could it be that All For One was *really* after a "friendly chat"?

Toshinori snorted at the futility. "Once upon a time, I might've agreed with deterring him, but young Midoriya's resourcefulness would've carried him to this line of work even without a Quirk. No amount of guilt slinging or authority can hold him back once his mind is made up." No amount of manipulation by All For One would change his mind either.

"A paragon beyond all reproach," was nearly crooned back. "Not that there was anyone to offer a meaningful reproach." There was an absentminded flick of his hand. "Inko Midoriya has no meaningful social contact with anyone, from my poking around," All For One *sighed* as if any of this really mattered to him beyond an extended taunt. "Katsuki Bakugou is the only individual apart from Izuku Midoriya who's had an exposure to her for a prolonged period of time." From the popping of All For One's knuckles, Toshinori could only assume this wasn't a positive discovery and cast his eyes around for another improvised weapon.

"This is news to you?" Inko Midoriya clearly cared about her son, but indeed, Toshinori couldn't ignore that young Midoriya's lack of esteem wasn't sourced from his school experiences alone. Any parent who

didn't attend an event standing in for their child's funeral raised red flags. To miss such an event meant there were a correspondingly severe cause for missing the event.

"But it's not to you," he hummed. "Why is that?" Not having an angry parent kicking in his front door over the bodily harm of their child was a decent indicator of distance in some form. Inko Midoriya had made no such attempts after USJ, the Sports Festival or Shigaraki's attempted maiming at the mall. As to what category Mrs Midoriya fell under, Toshinori didn't know the woman well enough to begin to guess.

"Young Midoriya doesn't rely on anyone for anything. Not his parents, not me and he sure as hell won't be leaning on you for anything." Tense. Go. Toshinori dashed in with a clothesline, that All For One blocked with an armful of tentacles.

All For One *chuckled*. "There's so much you don't understand about your own student. He doesn't ask for help, because he's learnt that no help will arrive. This isn't about reliance, it's about a lack of confidence in others." Confidence that All For One practically oozed.

"What would you know?" Another punch aimed squarely at All For One's already broken ribs.

Intercepted, yanked and Toshinori was flung through space and time yet again. This time… a school and they were falling through the air.

"The was his elementary school, All Might," All For One called as Toshinori was thrown clean through the roof of the main administrative building. A shockwave followed him in, tearing the building in half. "The students and teachers used to mock him for dreaming of working in our industry." Our industry? Is that what this was to All For One? Ruining thousands upon thousands of lives was a job to him? "Even though their dreams were utterly worthless and they lacked the requisite drive to ever accomplish them, they still persisted with their harassment. Introspection never arrived, blinded as they were by their mediocrity. The teachers in their dead end professions as puppets for the government propaganda machine and the students eagerly eating from their palms." Another impact flattened a building a hundred metres away from Toshinori and his eyes narrowed. "And still… his parents did nothing."

"Bit rich for you to be complaining about them eating out of palms considering how your Quirk works. Aren't you all about exploiting the

vulnerable and gullible?" With a lifting tap of a heel, Toshinori punted a dumpster through the air. Without flinching, All For One volleyed it into yet another building well past Toshinori. If he was paying attention, it wasn't to Toshinori. There hadn't been a single fatal or maiming blow aimed at him so far.

"Precisely and that makes me an expert in the field, All Might." Card carrying as ever, the bastard. "Petty, petulant behaviour from proven inferiors. The only excuse is cowardice. The unwillingness to confront that they might be the ones who have to change." An aside glance. "I was referring to his parents, for reference All Might. There's no excuse for the things they didn't do."

Another grip and Toshinori managed to force in a lungful of air as they jumped yet again, with All For One punting him into yet another school below.

"Middle school and more of the same, I'm afraid to say." Only All For One's voice didn't echo from the sky above as the man dragged him along the ground while Toshinori struggled to find purchase on the glossy floor. "To the contrary, it seems that everyone apart from Izuku Midoriya was allowed to hold onto their hopes and dreams, because those hopes and dreams conformed with having a Quirk. But not the poor Quirkless boy." All Might was dragged to his feet as All For One leapt into the air.

BOOM.

Young Midoriya had a middle school. Toshinori used the term "had", because where the school had once existed, there was now a twenty foot deep crater from where All For One had unceremoniously detonated the gas lines. Hovering above the core of the detonation, shielded only by All For One's Quirks, Toshinori only had his imagination to feel the heat from the inferno below.

All For One wasn't here for All Might or Toshinori would already be dead.

"Why Izuku Midoriya?" The school was powder, dust and chunks of rebar. Any negative memories associated with place would have to be reconstructed with photographs, because the school itself was no more. A source of negative memories, ejected from reality.

"Why not Izuku Midoriya? Am I not allowed to want the same things that everyone else wants?" All For One deflected a blow that Toshinori had experimentally aimed upwards. Shame, it would've

ruptured his spleen. Still, no retaliation. “It wasn’t just the Quirk.” *It wasn’t just the Quirk*, Toshinori replayed with dawning horror, lifting his arms to block an airburst that tore the air from his lungs and moved him clear of the still burning gas. “Izuku Midoriya just so happens to have your former Quirk attached to him, but that’s not why we’re here.”

“Why Izuku Midoriya?” Toshinori repeated the question and wiped the blood from his eyes and glared at All For One.

“He’s *everything*, Toshinori Yagi. Everything. Minimal loss of human resources, maximisation of available Quirk assets, mitigation of Quirk recoil, superior analytics and assessments of incident response, excellent networking skills…” All For One dreamily trailed off and Toshinori’s bruised eyes still found a way to widen in spite of the inflammation was holding them nearly shut. “His Quirk is a mystery for the ages, even more so than when it was in your possession and even with a full lifetime I doubt its secrets can be fully unravelled.” There was an ecstasy in All For One’s gestures that had Toshinori rocking in discomfort. “So much potential if only he dropped the dead weights holding him back. How is he to soar ever higher when the burden he carries clips his wings?” Izuku Midoriya had been a stark upholder of human decency and no amount of sweet talking from All For One was going to change it. Izuku Midoriya would always be Izuku Midoriya. With sixteen years to make a worse choice, it was instead time the boy spent striving to improve life for others. It was extremely unlikely that such a change would occur during All For One’s remaining lifespan, let alone Toshinori’s rapidly decaying one. “Just imagine what he could achieve without those shackles.”

“Shackles? You mean the shackles you put on him after you killed him?” He growled so vehemently that All For One stepped back. *Be afraid, you bastard. Be very afraid.* “He’s not yours and he’s not mine either,” Toshinori spat out. At least he didn’t have any loose teeth. “He’s not a possession for you to toy with.”

“Of course not,” instantly shot back, All For One’s forehead furrowing. “No one who’s ever met Izuku Midoriya could claim to own him in any sense of the word. His own parents haven’t even earned that lofty privilege.” The moment Toshinori spent gawking at that statement, almost cost him his arm as he hurled himself sideways from the retaliatory park bench that materialised out of thin air.

He couldn’t hold back the snort. “We saw what you did to Tenko Shimura. How much free will was in that arrangement?” From what

Gran said, there wasn't all that much left of Tenko Shimura in Tomura Shigaraki and it was going to be decades of intensive medical treatment before he was fit for further questioning.

"Tenko Shimura is what happens when one doesn't have the option of picking Izuku Midoriya."

"You know," Toshinori whispered to himself, hoisting himself to his feet. "When you keep talking about young Midoriya like that, I'm almost starting to believe that you're not here for me."

"Here I was thinking it was obvious."

Take two. Izuku's eyes shot open and once again he was back in the memory bedroom. This time All For One's nose was pressed against the glass of the window, squinting out into the flashes of light and silhouettes illuminating the room. Definitely One For All.

"Was that… was that All Might?" Freezing, the scene outside the apartment window flashed again. As though they were ghosts drifting above the battlefield, both Izuku and the Quirk saw All For One and All Might exchanging blows in the ruins of a school. If only Izuku was closer he could've read what was left of the shattered sign that sat at the edge of a rather large crater. It was a school, but Izuku wasn't sure which school had become the target of All For One's ire.

"Yes. So long as Suspended Animation is applicable there's nothing to be done apart from loitering," the Quirk sneered. "All Might is using the fumes left behind and they're almost at an end. When they fade, our view won't be nearly so clear." Even as he spoke, the window was flickering in and out of focus.

"Can the other you hear us while we're in his head?" That was the real danger. If All For One realised how his own Quirk cheated the workings of One For All while in a conflict with what was left of One For All…

"No, not while he's awake as it's always been both a perk and limitation," the Quirk glibly answered and the hair on the back of Izuku's neck bristled. "At the same time, without him being able to hear us, there's nothing we can do to intervene or distract him. Your body's off limits so long as Suspended Animation is in effect and his is off limits by him having no capacity to interface with his Quirk spirits while awake." This was Izuku's life now. A voice in the head of his

mass murdering, serial killer stalker who couldn't even hear his complaints. "All we can do is watch and hope he's learnt his lesson." When pigs flew. Though with enough applied kinetic energy, just about anything could fly, so maybe that wasn't the best standard.

"Why now?" Clearly All For One didn't want Izuku to intervene in his brawl with All Might or Suspended Animation wouldn't have been wheeled out of storage. "What changed at this exact moment for him to use Suspended Animation and provoke All Might?"

"The information he had on hand. All For One, both Quirk and person, are characterised by a preference for an onion approach to planning. Contingency plan, upon contingency plan until all possible paths could be corralled into a favourable outcome." Contingency planning was one of All For One's very few admirable traits. Less admirable was him using it to cover for his poor impulse control while he killed people. "My other self has discovered an alternative path."

"Him killing me really wasn't part of the plan at all, was it?" Izuku followed All Might as he launched an elbow straight into All For One's ribs and sent the supervillain plunging into the rock below.

A sardonic smile that belonged to a shark more than a sardine. "You having me in any capacity was never part of his plan, let alone you being in a position where an accidental death could occur. It being at his own hands was a wakeup call." Izuku wasn't meant to be near All For One's operations. Was them living near UA deliberate for that exact purpose?

"Now what?" What was going through All For One's ancient head? What could he have possibly uncovered in such a simple conversation that wasn't known a decade earlier?

"Good question." At that moment, the window went blank.

Toshinori impacted, slid and rolled, tumbling into the metallic object with dull thud. Groaning, Toshinori dragged himself to his feet… in the middle Kamino Ward. Shit. Complete with that worthless statue of himself, which in spite of his protests, had still been erected. A monument to all of his failures.

"Here we are, where it all ends. Where Izuku Midoriya died." All For One framed against the battered statue of All Might, his back to Toshinori. Toshinori felt his stomach twist even more uneasily. At this

point the prick wasn't even faking concern. From the instant Toshinori had entered that building, with All For One lying in wait, his fate was sealed. They'd taken too long to out All For One and the embers of One For All were dying cinders. Toshinori's colleagues were too busy extinguishing the litany of fires that All For One had set during their "tour" to come to his aid.

"So is this it?" The blood was thicker than it normally was; somewhere deeper down was bleeding. "Finally going to finish me off?" One For All's last sparks had well and truly faded. There was no more pretence of this being a fight, let alone a fair fight. As soon as All For One stopped playing around, young Midoriya would be beyond the reach of them all.

"Oh no no no, Toshinori Yagi," All For One waggled a finger. "I wouldn't dream of inflicting such a torment upon Izuku Midoriya. One For All is enough of a burden without the full weight of your spirit further smothering him. The last thing he needs is another ghost haunting his every step."

"What the hell are you talking about?" As esoteric as ever.

"It was here that Izuku Midoriya's life came to an end, because I was blinded by our petty feud. Engaged in a competition that he wasn't even aware of at the time." Captured by the scruff of his neck, Toshinori was dragged into a sitting position against the base of the statue with his muscle form completely spent.

All Might was well and truly dead.

"You didn't know either, did you?" Close. Close enough for Toshinori to wrap his fingers around the prick's neck and squeeze. "About his parents, his history with his schooling, his constant flirtation with near death experiences long before he ever made it into UA?" Eyes closed, All For One was perched on a stray block of concrete, leaning on his hand. All Might was no longer a threat to All For One.

"Not about the parents." The near death experiences and shoddy schooling Toshinori knew all about from personal experience. "I didn't meet his mother until after you killed him," Toshinori heaved and was rewarded with a flinch for his efforts.

"So how exactly are we any different, All Might?" It was the wrong question to ask for starters, because that assumed similarities and Toshinori was counting zero in that department. "We both assumed that all was well, didn't we? I might have been the one to pull the

metaphorical trigger Yagi, but you didn't anticipate or stop him from being here in the first place. You already knew from his previous disobedience that he wouldn't sit back and watch. So why didn't you act?" A question Toshinori had been asking himself ever since he'd pulled Bakugou away from the rubble.

"I thought he knew better than to follow any of the leads," Toshinori confessed. "We didn't know that students set a tracker on the Noumu, but he still wasn't fully recovered from the attack. We thought it'd be enough to keep from pursuit, given Bakugou's temperament and the perceptions of the class towards him." Katsuki Bakugou was far more popular now with the entirety of UA due to his charity work with Mrs Midoriya. While he was still a foul mouthed, short tempered elastic ball of aggression, he was a much more rounded and stable one.

"You would of course be correct, if not for the detail that he wasn't there for Bakugou alone." It was a detail the staff at UA had long considered in their assessment of the poor boy's murder. "In informing him of One For All's history, you likewise informed him of my sponsorship of Shigaraki. You rescuing Bakugou and capturing Shigaraki would necessitate my involvement as a direct result." All For One inclined his head towards Toshinori. "It's a simple matter of logic and one that he expertly followed. He knew of your injuries, but not mine." Injuries that hadn't been fully uncovered due to the bastard fleeing. "If he hadn't removed Bakugou from the state of play, you would have died," All For One bluntly stated. "I would have succeeded, but at an unimaginable and unwanted cost. I would've won the battle, only to lose the war after killing the first person to so much as utter a whisper of support in his direction." None of that was inconsistent with their own research, but pieces of the puzzle were still missing. "In saving Bakugou, he also saved your life." And Toshinori had spent every single night ever since thinking about it excruciating detail. Second by second.

"Why care about what he thinks of you in the first place?" That was the question around which all other questions revolved. Why the hell was All For One fixated on one kid he shouldn't have known in the first place?

"Long before he was ever yours, he was mine." *Mine*, echoed in Toshinori's skull. All For One with his collection of Quirks and *people*. Had young Midoriya escaped his fate because of All Might's very existence?

"You were serious about only choosing Tenko Shimura because you

couldn't have young Midoriya." He could taste bile, but whether it was a ruptured organ or the physical manifestation of All For One's words on his tastebuds was unknown.

"Never has there been a truer statement than Tomura Shigaraki being an inferior version of Izuku Midoriya. You had maybe a year to plumb those murky depths, whereas I had his entire lifetime and still failed to act on any of the difficulties discussed tonight," All For One's head was bowed and Toshinori was completely unable to shove him away. "At first I was content to blame you for towing the same old party line that led him to his views, but his death changed everything. Only then did I dive below the lingering sediment and discover more concerning aspects of his life."

"You didn't know about his parents," Toshinori squinted over at his arch enemy. "It was a blind spot." A fatal flaw, assuming that young Midoriya had paternal support when that clearly wasn't the case. If All For One was to be believed, Inko Midoriya was more subtle, but still carried the same flavour of prejudice as her son's classmates. Hisashi Midoriya wasn't even in the picture. Then again… hadn't Bakugou overheard All For One call the woman "more Quirk than person" during their last meeting?

"I was too confident in my assessment," the villain confirmed. "I assumed, like on so many other occasions, that I had accounted for everything in my foundational reasoning. I hadn't accounted for the stress that warped otherwise normal responses into far more insidious actions."

"Is that why you told Bakugou what you did?" He groaned. Everything ached.

"Inko Midoriya's personality died the day her son was diagnosed as Quirkless. She lacked the strength of will to resist the core instincts of her Quirk, which resulted in her sabotaging her son. After all, her Quirk's all about bringing things to her, isn't it? Even if it's against their will." His lips peeled back. "She's the weight that's breaking his wings. A parent who claims to care, but not once in twelve years has she ever shown it. She is why we're here." Really? They weren't here because of All For One kidnapping a child, then? Mrs Midoriya wasn't perfect, but All For One was the very last person qualified enough to be making judgements after what he'd done to Tenko Shimura.

Toshinori rocketed to attention so suddenly he felt his spine twitch and his vision spun. "Like one person being in the way's ever stopped

you before."

"So then why haven't I put you out of your misery?" That was true. It was a rule All For One was defying right at this very moment. "The hole I've dug is large enough without blasting another crater into it with your corpse. Unlike his parents, you do care about what he wants… and that's enough of a justification. I might not trust his mother or father, but you are all about consistency, aren't you *Detective Yagi*?" All For One leered.

"Heard about that did you…" More of a surprise if he hadn't, with how far Detective Yagi's reputation had spread through the criminal underground. Efficiency that had been demanded to find young Midoriya.

"Rumour has it that Detective Yagi solved more cold cases in six months than the Central Department had in the previous ten years combined," All For One purred. "There was coverage in the newspaper, you realise? Of All Might's once faceless secretary, who finally answered his true calling as a menace to criminals all over. All Might might've captured criminals… but Detective Yagi shattered them into tiny pieces. An unstoppable fiend, capable of killing with a look." There was a smooth laugh as All For One leaned over to rest a hand on Toshinori's shoulder and Toshinori's head swam with pressure.

"No one else was willing to do it…" No one else *could* do it without the protection that All Might's reputation afforded him.

"I never used to understand you, you know. Why you did what you did, but your performance has been most enlightening. Perhaps, if I hadn't ended Nana Shimura's life, we'd be having a very different conversation." A hypothetical that clawed at Toshinori's stomach. "But now we've come to the end of the limited time I've bought for us."

"All of that destruction… was to buy time for what?" Why was it so dark?

"For this moment, Detective Yagi. For a toast to you, *Toshinori Yagi,*" All For One quietly murmured and a rustle as he rose to his feet. "To the death of our dreams and the birth of our responsibilities as time marches on. The age of heroes was beautiful while it lasted, but all dreams must one day come to an end. Give Izuku my regards when you see him next, will you?"

When Toshinori's vision cleared, he was in an ambulance. The sirens

drilled into his head as every bump in the road slammed into his spine with more prejudice than All For One had ever managed. Gran Torino hovered over him, along with a paramedic.

“Toshi, where does it hurt?” Far too worried when Toshinori was clearly still alive. It can’t have been that bad if he made it to an ambulance.

“Everywhere. Can’t… you see?” He was bleeding from everywhere. Why were they asking?

“See what, Toshi? You’re covered in blood, but there aren’t any wounds. What the hell happened?”

Only then did Toshinori remember All For One’s hand lingering on his shoulder. “Shit.”

Sir Nighteye was still a gibbering mess by the time the taxi had shown up to take him to the hospital. Apparently all of the ambulances and police were occupied by All Might’s operation to take out All For One and the sirens that cut through the air rattled Katsuki’s bones. Already the news inside was showing a building that’d fully pancaked, its dust cloud contained by a ring of pro heroes who managed to smother it before the shockwave could take out the surrounding street. They’d collapsed All For One’s *skyscraper*… And Katsuki was still stuck at the old man’s house instead of hauling arse back to Deku’s apartment. Not for much fucking longer if he had anything to say about it.

“That’s it, fuck everyone, I’m going to Deku’s house.” Katsuki kicked open the front door and marched outside. There was a muffled noise of complaint from behind him. “Don’t any of you even think about-,” Katsuki stared. “What the fuck are you idiots already doing out here?”

“Dude, did you see the news?” Moron was pulling on what was left of his costume and so was everyone else. All of them had brought costumes apart from Katsuki. Katsuki whose breath quickened and his lungs spasmed. “It’s not Kamino level, but All For One’s demolishing Mustafar. We have to go help the civilians at least. There’s not enough pros and first responders to get everyone out in time.”

Time slowed to a standstill. All For One. A building falling. A body buried in the rubble. All of it crawled through Katsuki’s heads, piece by piece. “You idiots. Do you have any idea what you’re suggesting?” It was going to happen again, wasn’t it? Fuck, if he was dropping

buildings it was guaranteed to have already happened again. “You can’t go. This is why they didn’t want us to go.” Gentle Criminal, La Brava and Katsuki couldn’t stop any of them either. There wasn’t any time when Mrs Midoriya wasn’t answering her phone. All For One might’ve been locked in a slugging match with All Might that went the length of the neighbourhood, but he still had other minions to do his bidding.

“It’s okay, Bakugou.” Froggy’s hand gripped his shoulder and he flinched. “You go find Mrs Midoriya and we’ll help with the rescues. We have spotters for debris this time. This isn’t like what happened to Midoriya. We know what to look out for with All For One.”

“Spotting it doesn’t matter if you can’t dodge or block it,” he snapped back, shrugging off her hand.

“We have manly teams for exactly that purpose,” Kirishima flicked a thumbs up that did more for Katsuki wanting to flatten his face into the concrete than the intended reassurance.

“We also received permission this time,” Ponytail’s voice cut in from behind. “Don’t worry, we’ll take care of it.”

“Who the fuck gave you-”

Katsuki got in a single mouthful of air, before Gentle launched all three of them into the air. One gasp for one last sentence of advice. “Don’t die, you fucking redshirts!” Was all he managed to get out, with the rest of the class waving goodbye as he was dragged through the air by the class’ babysitters.

“We understand your concerns, Bakugou, but the situation with Mrs Midoriya can’t be ignored and nor do we have the resources to restrain your classmates. I have notified your teachers about their intention to assist and we can only hope they’re kept away from the worst of the conflict,” Gentle was yelling through the wind, even as Katsuki stabilised their trajectory. He didn’t like it, but there was no avenue for him being in two places at once like that League dunce. Mrs Midoriya was a civilian and came first because she couldn’t defend herself. If they wanted to go off and get themselves killed… then… then there was nothing Katsuki could do. UA’s staff had already been informed and that was it for them. Katsuki couldn’t influence their choices anymore than they could influence Deku in his choice to rescue him at Kamino.

All he could do now was focus. Rocketing through the air was a

normal part of Katsuki's Quirk. Rocketing through the air with two criminals spicing it up with an elasticity Quirk to make impossible corners possible wasn't normal. It wasn't approved and it sure as hell wouldn't have been allowed if any of the teachers knew why Katsuki and these two were headed back to the home of Inko Midoriya. Walking into All For One's traps was a job for All Might, not a student and two criminals, there wasn't any time.

Mrs Midoriya wasn't answering her phone and that was enough for a reason to defy orders. For all of her faults, the one thing Inko Midoriya could be relied on to do was check her phone and it wasn't late enough for her to have it on silent. Ever since the Shigaraki mall incident, her phone was almost never on silent, even when she was asleep. Not with the amount of League of Degenerates shit happening during the night.

But this was taking too fucking long and the police were all fucking busy chasing after All Might and All For One; who was doing his best to flatten as much of UA's home suburb as he could in one night. Streets were closed for air and ground movement and their path to get back to Mrs Midoriya's apartment was entirely too roundabout when they could all hear the distant impacts of All For One's path of destruction.

Arriving at the apartment did nothing for the hand wrapped around his guts. Fumbling for his keys and edging open the front door and inching in only had the tension grow as step by step all seemed perfectly normal. Or it would've been if not for the eerie silence that permeated the entire complex. Gentle and La Brava stalked in after him and split off to the other rooms.

Beelining straight to her room, Katsuki threw open the door.

BANG.

The raised mound in the middle of Mrs Midoriya's bed remained unmoved and Katsuki's heart skipped a beat. "Mrs Midoriya?"

Nothing. Silence. Katsuki edged over and there she was tucked under the covers, as if she was paused in time.

Mrs Midoriya was alive(?) and… Katsuki wasn't fucking sure if "well" covered it in a realistic sense. The woman was a light and anxious sleeper, but hadn't budged an inch during Katsuki's intentionally aggressive entry strategy. Having La Brava and Gentle Criminal help themselves to a fridge full of cake and a pantry full of tea should've

been enough to get her up and going at the intruders. But nope, nada, zilch.

But why?

“Bakugou, is she here?”

“Yeah, get the fuck over here and get the hell of out my fridge. This… this isn’t fucking right.” Grimacing, he pulled back the covers and still nothing. No chest movement, no breathing, she was perfectly still. Dead to the world in almost literal sense of the phrase. Almost as if… she was being kept that way. Almost as if… the elusive Suspended Animation Quirk had finally entered play.

Gentle Criminal and La Brava barged into the room, the former with a plate of cake still in hand. “I think that La Brava should call for an ambulance, Bakugou,” he murmured, as if Mrs Midoriya could still hear them. Not that his offsider needed anymore encouragement, with her hand darting for her phone.

Katsuki turned on his heel and stomped over to the one place in the house he actively avoided - Deku’s room. Untouched, as if he’d be back at any time. Had been untouched, until All For One had fucking burglarised it, like the petty fucking thief he’d always be at heart. Now there sat a gaping void in the middle of Deku’s collection. A void where Hero Analysis for the Future no longer sat, because Katsuki slept through the earliest parts of All For One dropping over, before it escalated into an interrogation. All For One was chomping at the bit and aggressively pawing the ground for Deku related dirt and made off with an entire bag of fertile soil to enable more stalking.

BANG.

Not that there was going to be anything-

“Huh, what was that?” A voice groaned from a lump in Deku’s bed. “It’s too bright, turn off the lights.” A lump that had Deku’s hair colour, his voice, his closed (not open this time) eyes, his body shape and was hanging off his All Might action figure in a room where everything was now neatly in place.

Katsuki screamed at the exact same time Mrs Midoriya coughed.

Chapter End Notes

One to go.

Work has been an absolute nightmare. Next chapter later this month, if it all goes smoothly. Typos will be fixed eventually (or when I'm paid for it. =P)

Asystole

Chapter Summary

The death of the masquerade.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Impossible. It shouldn't have been conceivable, but here they all were… All Might was dead, but Toshinori Yagi had lived in spite of the odds. Alive, exhausted, inhaling everything in front of him and not dead, but One For All was gone. All Might had been killed. What was left of the Quirk had been spent and that chapter had now forever closed. Now, it was Midoriya's turn, so they said, but…

"Sir, you alright over there?" All Mi-Toshinori's eyes were fixed just over his shoulder at an obnoxiously large, bow covered gift hamper. Mr Yagi was a different person, Mirai had been reliably informed.

"I'm fine." It was the stress. His heartbeat would settle of its own accord eventually.

Gran Torino. "Yeah, right. Bakugou told us you were a mess and the doctors agreed. Them releasing you is because you're not going to die on the spot and they've got people who're worse off than you coming in." A grunt. "Not like they can treat what he did to you anyway." What was the treatment for a stolen Quirk? Mirai hadn't ever thought to ask. They'd been chasing All For One for years, but All Might was immune to All For One's theft and that was all that mattered. Not once had Mirai ever considered that one day it might happen to him. Not once had he considered that he might come to All For One's personal attention… but it wasn't because of his link to All Might. It was because of Izuku Midoriya and All For One's obsession with his victim. No amount of Foresight could've warned him not to walk into his office for overtime, with Togata's reassignment leaving them stretched thin. Nothing could've prepared him for All For One's offhanded flick that flung him through half of the office. Nothing could've prepared him what had been said by that monster.

Then there was the months of torment Midoriya had endured at the hands of All For One. The boy who Mirai had assumed was long dead, but not even that had been granted to him. Midoriya who'd been held

captive, then released on a whim and immediately moved to a secure hospital for evaluation before anyone was allowed to visit. Midoriya who had died and been denied his death, while Mirai did what? (What had he done apart from make a difficult situation even more difficult?) It was a wonder Mirai or Midoriya managed to walk away from their respective encounters with All For One. The same applied to All Might, now permanently Mr Yagi. Everyone had come away scarred by the experience, missing essential pieces of themselves. Mirai was lucky that out of the three of them that he'd only lost a Quirk. Toshinori and Midoriya had both died and who knew how much of them was still left on the other side?

"You had a heart attack." The words came out of Mirai's mouth before he could stop himself. "You shouldn't be alive." Just like Midoriya, who All For One had also resurrected, and shouldn't have been alive. A real life necromancer out in the world. For their profession, raising the dead was a far more grim prospect than that same someone playing musical Quirks. Or it least it would've been had Mirai still possessed his original career prospects. The exact mechanism for how both deaths had been cheated was a mystery, which had only egged on the doctors in finding that smoking gun of the mechanism for their survival. Apart from the lingering biological signs, it was as if the death hadn't occurred in the first place in Toshinori's case.

"What?" Toshinori grimaced around a mouthful of hospital food. "I don't feel like I had a heart attack." There was no weakness, shortness of breath, pain or any of the other symptoms Mirai came to associate with life threatening cardiac events. By all accounts, Toshinori was falling over from a lack of hydration and nondescript muscle aches, but the distinct lack of him being a corpse indicated that cardiac arrest wasn't among those problems. Both a marvel and a malady for the doctors on his team.

"The troponin levels are there, Toshi." Gran Torino was leaning over a clipboard, eyeing off results he most definitely should not have been reading. "You weren't awake when the team was here, but the bloods are the bloods. It wasn't a small one either, from the results. You shouldn't be alive."

There was the vaguest hint of an eyebrow being raised. "But I feel fine. Bit knocked around, but nowhere near as bad as last time." Last time, when last time was him bleeding out on the ground after returning the favour to All For One. For supposed reassurance, it wasn't doing much to calm Mirai's racing heart.

“You shouldn’t feel fine, Toshi. You should be dead. They reckon your heart stopped entirely - cardiac arrest.” The same as Midoriya.

“But I’m not dead!” Toshinori gestured with a flair. “I feel better than I did before. Like…” Too grand. Too enthusiastic. Too much like All Might. “Like from before I was injured. I haven’t coughed up blood once since I woke up. It’s… it’s amazing.” The entire room hurriedly averted their eyes. If there was a moist glint while Toshinori discussed his newfound, miraculous health, as granted by the local career criminal, then none of them were about to comment on it.

“Yeah, and what pound of flesh did All For One take for that exchange? He never does anything free of charge,” Gran Torino snidely shot back. Apparently, the elder had missed the memo about not commenting on the source of this goodwill.

“Nothing that matters,” Toshinori shot back dismissively. “The important part is that All For One, whatever brain snap he may have experienced, returned young Midoriya. That’s the only part mattering here.” Important for multiple reasons. Returning a captive hadn’t been in All For One’s playbook and the necromancy was an entirely new and outrageous dimension investigators now had to consider when dealing with All For One. Considering he had multiple hands in the collective pies of villain organisations everywhere, it’d haunt the dreams of law enforcement with added complexity.

“I can’t believe All For One gave him back without strings attached,” Gran Torino grunted and Mirai privately agreed, but as Bakugou had stressed, there was a time and a place for these thoughts.

Toshinori cleared his throat. “Not quite. Both the doctors and police have to make sure that no latent suggestions or any mind control Quirks are attached to his return. There have been previous hostages returned, but were sleeper agents.” Who went on to kill a large amount of people before they were caught and subdued. Clearing Midoriya for any lingering Quirk interference was for the best. “He’s going to be watched for a long time before he’s clear to do any work unsupervised from that let alone any atrophy.” Or torture, but Bakugou’s urgent texts to Gran Torino hadn’t made mention of physical injuries.

“You know what’s not what I mean!” The old man snapped back, clenching a fist. “None of this is in his character. Returning Midoriya, you and Sir Nighteye not being splattered on the pavement, him having a conversation with Bakugou that didn't end in a murder.”

“Running after a kid he dropped a building on wasn’t in his character either. We know All For One the villain, not whoever the hell he is when the mask drops.” What a difference it must’ve been when Midoriya’s main symptom was puzzlement at his change in location more than anything else. Was All For One a different person when not playing the part of the prime evil or was he mere better at hiding his tendencies?

“Hmmph, I still don’t like this, Toshinori.”

“We won’t know until we investigate and at least we have him back so we can investigate.” How unlike All Might in attitude. Before there’d be a rush to apprehend All For One, but after playing the part of policeman and losing his Quirk, at least the persona of Mr Yagi had prepared him for retiring from his role as All Might. “I’m eager to go see young Midoriya, but that fiend outside is waiting for me…”

“I mean him dragging you back from the brink,” Gran Torino added through gritted teeth.

“That’s not a mystery,” Toshinori chuckled. “He was clear it was only because of young Midoriya… which is precisely why we need to thoroughly interview him to find out what the hell happened to make All For One so obsessed with him.” Then find a way to arrest him, before All For One decided to abscond with Midoriya a second time.

They lapsed into a disgruntled silence. Toshinori was humming contently, Gran Torino was glaring daggers into him from across the room and Mirai found himself drifting off.

“What do I do now?” Mirai gazed blankly at the ceiling. No Quirk… no heroics. All Might was dead and so was Sir Nighteye.

“Easy, we need more people over at the police HQ,” Toshinori jumped in without missing a beat. “Tsukauchi’s having kittens at the clean up and search and rescue efforts. All hands onboard, including the police for sorting out the casualties and damage,” he nearly snarled. “That bastard’s still more than capable of wiping out a city when it suits him, even as a distraction.”

The police? Mirai hadn’t even considered the police, with their work relegated to processing prisoners. At least it had been until Mr Yagi had practically taken over his local department. Maybe now it wouldn’t be so farfetched if there was more of the typical legwork? “I’ll think about it,” he finally answered.

“That’s all I’m asking for.” Without another word, Toshinori wriggled further into his sheets. “I’m not sure why I’m so relaxed… I died, All For One’s on the loose and we can’t do anything about it. It’s such a weird feeling. Almost as if it isn’t mine in the first place.” He trailed off, before abruptly jumping back to attention. “Hey, can one of you check the tag on that hamper? It’s eating away at me, but…” Toshinori motioned out the door where a stern faced nurse was lying in wait, as he’d already discovered the hard way.

Mirai reached over and squinted at the tag.

Mr Yagi,

Thank you for taking care of him for me.

Neat, impersonal computer print with no name. Mirai obligingly read it out. “There’s no name.”

“Huh, that’s odd. Never would’ve pegged Mr Yagi for having an anonymous well wisher. Eh.” Only then, did he snuggle back under the sheets.

Perhaps, if Mirai took a leaf out of Toshinori’s book, he would still be able to do something. Anything without his Quirk. And to think he’d spent so many years unknowingly forcing Togata closer and closer towards All For One's line of sight.

All For One was still out there somewhere and with him was Mirai Sasaki’s Quirk.

What a fine mess All Might had left them with at the station. He might’ve been off, fresh from a life or death struggle with All For One, but Naomasa was of the firm opinion that a stint in hospital was an improvement over the city block sized crime scene that had to be established. What were they up to now? Five different crime scenes? Or was it six? Who knows? It wasn’t Naomasa’s department for once and for that he was eternally grateful as he micromanaged his way through the chaos. Endeavor had ejected himself out of a nearby bit of shrubbery, with the younger Todoroki right on his heels.

Naomasa could’ve sworn that UA hired babysitters to keep the kids occupied during the operation, but that question quickly died on his lips when Todoroki glanced up at him and mouthed “no” while shaking his head. Both of them plunged into a still smoking apartment

complex and Naomasa shrugged.

Last time they'd flouted the law within range of All For One it resulted in a death. At least this time, All For One's targets were nowhere near as dense with population, with numerous schools obliterated in the crossfire. It wasn't much considering the travel of the shockwaves, but it wasn't quite Kamino level. So long as they were supervised and no one got themselves killed, Naomasa was willing to turn a blind eye. That's what he told himself anyway, because even without a blind eye, there wasn't the resources to prevent them from helping in the first place. Ultimately, any punishment was going to be the responsibility of UA. The police had more than enough work with this alone.

With Mr Yagi in the hospital and everyone else frantically extinguishing fires, both literal and figurative, there wasn't time for any police department posturing. Not now during an emergency and certainly not after the emergency as they shifted back to assisting the insurance assessors with claims stemming from criminal conduct. Between that, the new arrests of villains who decided to take advantage of the chaos and the obscenely large backlog of interrogations they had to peruse (courtesy of Mr Yagi), there just wasn't the time or manpower to deal with 1-A. Long gone were the days of patiently waiting for villains to be dumped at their doorstep.

On the bright side, the police were enjoying record high public confidence due to the steadily dropping crime rate. Convictions were up, crime was down and there had been a spring in everyone's step in spite of the crushing workload and management's refusal to train more police.

On the downside, the police were also enjoying a skills shortage so severe, that local students from hero schools had been offered paying roles to help clear the backlog in report processing. It was only a matter of time before the local media caught wind of the police breaching the child labour laws while under the guise of work experience, but the tabloids were vicious and it'd only last so long. Everyone knew they were stalling for time.

Dabi, at least, had been dropped off their immediate books, with him being denied bail and set to appear in court at a much later date, much to Naomasa's relief. Endeavor and his children had expressed their concerns about Dabi being the remnants of Touya Todoroki's corpse, animated for a nefarious purpose by All For One. That left Naomasa signing off to forensics over at the local villain hospital for an examination of the perp in question. If Dabi was Touya Todoroki,

or a rotting husk of him, then the white coated wonders would have it sorted out before it went to court. If this entity was indeed Touya Todoroki, they'd work out a timeline and whether or not he had legal capacity at the time the crimes were committed and when the confessions were extracted. They couldn't take him to a conventional trial if he wasn't acting under his own will.

If it wasn't Touya Todoroki? Well, the local teaching hospital wanted was left after the almost guaranteed execution for medical research and that was beyond Naomasa's control. If Dabi wasn't a Todoroki, then the remains were left in the hands of the State and the State was big on life saving medical research. As a serial killer, at least he'd have redeeming qualities in death.

Much like Sekijiro Kan, as case managed by Tamakawa and the boys in the absence of Mr Yagi, who had a snowflake's chance in hell of escaping the death penalty. There weren't any questions about his level of complicity in his actions when he was caught in the act by the two criminal consultants that Mr Yagi had hired. Thanks to La Brava and Gentle Criminal (that name was going to need changing if they wanted to be hired full-time by the department), they could skip the weasel words and dig into the meat of how All For One had convinced Kan to spy on his colleagues. How they'd met, what All For One held over Kan, any other spies he knew and any other sordid details would be milked from him, then only at the end would bureaucrats have their neatly stamped off execution. Provided Mr Yagi didn't stall on filling out the paperwork and with Kan, who was so universally disliked by everyone in the building, there was a good chance that everyone would "forget" to remind him to fill out the paperwork. Shame.

As for everyone else? Kurogiri was in a similar situation as Dabi, but Eraserhead and Present Mic were involved in that one and it was out of Naomasa's hands. Likewise, Gran Torino was convinced that Tomura Shigaraki's mind had been altered and it wasn't suitable to process him without further mental and Quirk evaluation. The rest of the League? They weren't so lucky and would be ash on the wind or tree supplements before the other three had their reports finalised.

All in all, with All For One out in the wild and Mr Yagi on the payroll, the police were far too busy to deal with kids on their provisionals. Thank god that, for once, it was someone else's problem.

Izuku Midoriya was dead. At least the version of him that Katsuki knew was long dead and buried. There were shadows of his ghost that occasionally showed through, but his trademark nervousness had been blown to smithereens. After months of talking shit to All For One, maybe it was a side effect of the few fucks that remained in his body moving on to greener pastures.

“Bakugou,” Izuku nodded, smiling ever so slightly. Izuku almost never fucking smiled at the sight of him showing up, but if Katsuki had spent months with the international shithead of mystery himself, Katsuki had to be an improvement even with their history.

“You’re not the same are you?” The rest of 1-A, plus Monoma were hiding around the corner. Even after all the shit they’d been through, they still weren’t buying that the Midoriya they met on the first day of school wasn’t *this* Midoriya. They’d argued and Katsuki had told them to fuck right off, but seeing was believing right? They didn’t find him. They weren’t there when he opened his eyes and called him the *wrong name*. After all of it, they didn’t really know him. At least not like Katsuki did. They couldn’t understand what was like to see Mrs Midoriya come running and be ignored by her own son. So here they were at a random ice cream joint, so 1-A could see for themselves that Izuku Midoriya wasn’t Izuku or Midoriya, but a different person entirely. As if he could come back from the dead and be the same person.

“There’s a mountain of reasons for that,” Izuku winced and pushed over a milkshake. “You read most of it in the police report. It was easier for them to release part of it than for me to have to…” An inhale. “Relive it.” Katsuki couldn’t only imagine, but visualise the creepy, touchy feely bullshit All For One engaged in when he was out of sight. Gran Torino, as Tenko Shimura’s only visitor, had stressed to them all clearly in debrief that All For One *wasn’t* a touchy person, unless his Quirk was in play. For him to latch onto Izuku was a new and mortifying entry into All For One’s police profile. Of course, none of them at the time had known about All For One’s dead family and from what All Might had said, that detail only enhanced the severity.

“So, what wasn’t in the police report?” A fucking lot with the amount of redactions. Parts were more black toner than they were paper. All For One must’ve been neck deep in fuckery if the cops were hiding it from the public.

“ThepartwhereheaccidentallyclonedhisQuirkandgaveittome,” escaped Izuku’s mouth and Katsuki sprayed his milkshake across the table.

Izuku expertly ducked out the way. For a moment, Katsuki was frozen in time with milk dripping from his still open mouth.

“What the fuck!? How the hell did that happen?” There was a muffled gasp behind him that Katsuki ignored. Had to ignore, because they weren’t due to say their part until after this conversation.

“All Might told you how All For One gave a Quirk to his brother?” Izuku was already mopping up the mess with a napkin, his face contorted in a grimace. Katsuki wasn’t too sure if it was the mess or the thought of All For One whipping his Quirk around like it was going out of fashion. Could be both.

Katsuki nodded, his heart beating uncomfortably in his chest. That shake in his hands wasn’t normal, was it? None of what they were discussing was normal, if Izuku had ended up with a clone of that arsehole’s Quirk.

“Well, it turns out that the stockpiling Quirk he gave to his brother captured a screenshot of All For One from back in the day when he was holding onto the Quirk. Because of that, his brother ended up with an imprint of All For One… and that imprint became known as One For All,” Izuku tiptoed through the explanation in the face of Katsuki’s silence. “One For All’s ability to hop from person to person comes from All For One in reality and he… the Quirk, has spent the last century posing as the brother, so the real All For One wouldn’t notice and have it destroyed. And now it’s in my head,” he concluded in a rush and Katsuki opened his mouth and closed it several times before he could kick the words out the hatch.

“As in a whole person imprint?” He croaked, because the words didn’t want to form.

“The whole person from back then,” Izuku confirmed… then drummed his fingers on the table. “But he made it worse.” Of course he did. Part of what made this experience so unnerving was Izuku’s total lack of hesitation. No crying, no sobbing, no lack of articulation in his wording. This was an irritating chore being checked off the list, not a life changing event worth crying over. This wasn’t the same Izuku.

Izuku spoke.

Katsuki felt like throwing up, the shudders wracking him all the more the longer Izuku spoke. The needles, the fussing, All For One’s dead kid, the realisation that Izuku had literally died and been yanked back

through the gates of death by two psychopaths. “Trigger is made from his blood. He gave you a blood cocktail, like an elder vampire or some messed up shit.” That All For One’s blood still had those properties and it could distilled into a drug, made Katsuki’s stomach rapidly knot. He was still out there and so was the drug made from him, that was now known to cause mental instability. Tsukauchi and All Might had to be shitting cinderblocks. Hell, Katsuki was on the verge of shitting out half a building site just listening to the recap.

“That’s the major part of it and because I have One For All, it stockpiled the cocktail as well and reinforced it with more power.” Now he spoke in an almost whisper. “I went from being only able to hear him while I slept to hearing him all the time. That’s why none of it is in the police report.”

“Yeah, because you’d get that one mouth breather who thought you were a threat to public safety.” Depending on which part of the public they referred to, Izuku was definitely a threat to public safety. He was a threat to the subterranean IQ level, arse breathers who shared that collective braincell with their counterpart mouth breathers up in Public Safety.

Izuku’s mouth momentarily twitched before he carried on. “There’s two versions of the Quirk. The one I have that’s… not exactly normal, but has more people skills and can approximate a standard person. Then there’s his original version that’s not normal and has less people skills that… can’t approximate a standard person.” There was a shrug, as if it was the most bland topic in the world and Katsuki wanted to scream into the abyss. “They take turns visiting and making comments. Apparently the real All For One can listen in as well, but none of us know why that happens.” With a gentle push, Katsuki slide his milkshake off to the side of the table.

There were three versions of All For One flitting around Izuku’s head and two of them were batshit crazy. It was no wonder that Izuku’s emotional range had dropped down to the point where it could be beaten by the range of a toothpick. So much time was spent wrangling his head full of societal rejects, he had to wonder what was left over for everyone else in the waking world? “How the fuck are you meant to deal with all of that?” Still, there wasn’t any mention of getting rid of One For All/All For One either.

“From what I understand… I don’t deal with it? I can’t offload the Quirk because the strain will kill the next person it lands on.” A flicker of discomfort and that was a problem, especially if the Quirk had

enough brains to turn the host into a meat puppet. All it'd do is make its way straight back to Izuku. "On the whole, after he got over the shock of it, he was happy that I had his Quirk. I spent every waking moment attacking him, attacking how he used his Quirk, how he treated people, how he treated his son and he was happy about it… because he wanted me to demonstrate the criticism." Perplexed didn't even begin to cover the combined feelings of everyone present. More of a shellshocked silence, really.

There was an explosive facepalm as Katsuki's head slammed into both of his open hands. "What the fuck is wrong with this guy? Didn't he have minions for that shit?"

"Not ones he liked talking to? I think?" For a moment, the Izuku of old shone through. "His Quirk checks in once a week. I think he's lonely." An indifferent shrug. "He didn't really talk about his feelings that much."

"Then why couldn't he go off and make friends like a non-fuckwit?" Without leaving a carpet of bodies and the maimed behind him as he went, which the vast majority of the population could manage.

"Same reason as me," he winced. "It's not really the Quirk, it's that instead of looking at people, he looks through them and they really, *really* don't like having their protective layering peeled open. The white lies stop working, the flattery gets them nowhere and it's just not… real." Was that in relation to Izuku or All For One? Probably both.

For a moment, Katsuki thought he had a witty reply. Then sixteen years of memories slammed into him and reevaluated his life choices. "Yeah, that'll do it." Not much Katsuki could do to contradict that perspective, when he was one of the morons perpetuating it towards Izuku and his fellow weirdos.

Smiling sardonically, Izuku carried on. "In summary? I have a stalker who's trying to fill the void of his long dead son. That stalker now has a link into my mind because the fragment of him hiding inside One For All influenced All Might to hand over the Quirk in first place. It doesn't matter where I go, because he can find me with Search and I have absolutely no idea what his motives are, because dropping me off back home and disappearing wasn't ever part of an agenda he discussed with me. So, uh, yeah, that happened." And he rubbed the back of his head, as if he wasn't being harassed by a person who should've had top billing on a specialised register. Izuku was handling

it well, because Katsuki was holding back the urge to throw up through sheer force of will.

“And All Might’s reaction to this absolutely groundbreaking, colossal clusterfuck of a situation?” He asked over clasped hands.

“He passed out and I had to call an ambulance,” followed by an indifferent shrug. “I think you’re both handling it well… Much better than I did,” came out in a nostalgic mumble.

“You’re not the same person anymore,” Katsuki hoarsely observed, blinking dust out of his eyes. The Izuku of old would’ve been bawling his eyes out. For this Izuku, it was another Tuesday.

“You’re not either,” Izuku answered glumly. “Nor All Might from what I’ve seen in the news or All For One apparently, because he sent All Might a gift hamper after landing him in hospital. I’d recognise that handwriting anywhere." What the hell? A gift hamper? "It’s not a bad thing… it’s different, but not bad.” Different. Everything was sure as hell different. Irreversibly different.

There was a hacking cough and the last frayed cords of Katsuki’s nerves snapped. “For fuck’s sake, you may as well come out now.” With that, the full contents of the clown car, slunk out from the shadows, including the driver. Aizawa was lurking at the rear, wide eyed, pale and nursing darker than average rings around his eyes. Todoroki was right there with him, standing apart from the rest of the pack.

“We didn’t want to overwhelm him,” Glasses adjusted his namesake accordingly. Everyone else was making halfhearted attempts to mop up tears. What was the point of hiding it? Aizawa wasn’t bothering.

Ponytail stepped forwards. “We’re so happy that you’re back, but it’s been hard…”

“That’s putting it mildly,” Kirishima muttered from the back.

“In all honesty, it was an unmitigated nightmare and a good time was not had by all,” Monoma piped up, pushing his way to the front. “But we get it. We don’t fully understand what happened but we get that you don’t want to talk about it any great detail.” For all the theatre, Monoma was definitely strained. Shit had gone down around that corner. “If you want to know what we were doing on the other side, we’ll be thrilled to share it as soon as you’re ready.” He bowed with a flair and Katsuki hoped the rest of them were smart enough to keep

that deflection alive.

Everyone else was shuffling back and forth, as if trying to push another person to the front. Round Face in particularly was trying and failing and Katsuki wanted to facepalm a second time. None of them needed to say anything.

“Thank you for understanding…I really… don’t want to dwell on it,” Izuku cringed, rocking in his seat.

“It’s okay Midoriya,” Froggy croaked.

Then Dumbarse went and ruined the moment and it all clicked together in Katsuki’s head. “You’ll always be the Midoriya we kn-”

“-If you start with *the Midoriya I know* horseshit,” Katsuki snapped out in falsetto, “I’m going to start slapping people and you’re going to be first. None of you fucking extras *knew* him before this happened. What, you go on one trip to a zoo or to the mall together and you think you’re a fucking expert on a person when you don’t even know his favourite hobby?” Slamming his chair backwards, he rose to feet. “You losers are the very last people, right up there with his parents, who get to stand here and talk about how much he’s changed. How the *fuck* would any of you know when you never knew him in the first place?”

Silence so thick that All For One could’ve smashed his way in with a tank buster and it wouldn’t have shifted.

“None of you were his friend. Fuck, even *I* wasn’t and I’m still not his friend, because it’s idiotic to assume that sharing a class and job field means that you’re best buddies forever after five minutes on the job.” They were going to understand. He was going to *make* them understand.

“But-” Pinky tried to interject and Katsuki dropped in the heel of his boot.

“- It’s not about *you*, Pinky and it’s not about imaginary friendships like a namby pamby self help comic. Shut the hell up. It’s about him having a traumatic experience and all of us piling on like it’s a circus event, instead of a deeply traumatic experience that’ll haunt him, more than anyone, for the rest of his life. Fucking nobody, absolutely nobody comes out a kidnapping without scars and you don’t get to sit here playing happy fun times, pretending nothing’s changed.” The only saving grace was Aizawa’s ever so slight head bob, along with a

stealthy double thumbs up. At least Katsuki had backup.

“So here’s what you’re going to do. You are going to shut the fuck up. You’re going to give him space. You aren’t going to be weird or overly involved and when he wants to give you the time of day, that’s on him. Does that sound good to everyone?” Katsuki got the words out through gritted teeth.

“Yes!” Returned in a chorus.

Todoroki made a non-committal gesture and broke the awkward bubble that’d formed. “We can talk later, Midoriya. The old man’s invited you over for dinner. Wants to talk about work and an internship.”

Izuku visibly perked up. “Thanks, Todoroki.”

“That’s our cue, kids.” Aizawa was shameless. “We’re out. The police still need help with paperwork,” and he savagely bared his teeth when the class groaned. “Don’t be like that, there’s more to being a pro hero than fist fighting villains in fast food carparks.” With that, he manhandled them out the door, totally disregarding their goodbyes and pathetic glances back into the building.

“Thanks… Kacchan, I appreciate what you've all done since it happened. All For One told me what you guys were doing. I know they’re trying to cheer me up, but I’d rather they didn’t. It's too much, too soon.”

Katsuki paused. Stared and cleared his throat. “No worries, you fucking nerd.”

“Can we stick with first names this time around?”

“Sure…”

Not quite the same Izuku. At least this one didn’t burst into tears on a whim.

There was a stranger in her house. Well, maybe multiple strangers. The police and pro heroes had left a small contingent of observers, just to keep an eye on things, in case Izuku’s kidnapper reappeared. But… they weren’t the strangers. Izuku was the stranger in this house. Unemotional, serious, apathetic. He didn’t even try to communicate

with her and him being home was a rarity. This wasn't her Izuku. They hadn't brought back *her* Izuku.

"Mum, we need to talk." Flat, expressionless… Was… was this still her Izuku? "You've been avoiding me and I've been ignoring you." Affectless. No tears, no tone of voice.

Was this her Izuku? How could it be him?

"Yes, Izuku?" The tears were already forming and she couldn't stop them. Izuku's eyes immediately narrowed.

"Was it a Quirk marriage? Did Hisashi pay you to have me?" A cannonball through her living room and her life.

Inko froze. "What?" Why was he asking that?

"Was it a Quirk marriage?" He repeated more slowly, while sipping a cup of tea at the other end of the dinner table. Like he was asking about the weather.

"No! It wasn't like that at all!" Burst out from her. "How can you even ask that?"

"How can you expect me and everyone else looking at your sham of a marriage to *not* ask that?" Erupted from him so abruptly that Inko leapt back in her chair. "I've never met Hisashi Midoriya. I don't know what he looks like, I've never spoken to him. I've never met him. This is meant to be my father who supposedly works overseas and sends back money…" The mug was set down with a clatter. "But he can't manage a video call? He can't fire up Hero View and say hi? He can't call normally? I was abducted by a serial killer because of him. You don't get to sit here and pretend that what's going on here is normal. I'm over it, especially after what happened with All For One." Cold. So cold. Inko trembled in an invisible wind. "Stop lying to me and tell me what you were *really* apologising for when that hack of a doctor told me I was Quirkless."

Without meaning to, her mouth opened. "It wasn't a Quirk marriage. Hisashi… Hisashi wanted a family and so did I." She hesitated.

"There's a but in there," was the almost threatening counter. She could see every bit of him tense.

"I…" Why did it hurt so much? Why did these questions hurt? "I didn't think you were going to be Quirkless," she uttered and Izuku

sighed, long and deep. “Then you kept talking about wanting to be a hero just like All Might and-and it was too dangerous and Hisashi thought so as well and-” She couldn’t stop. Not the sobs that wracked her body. Her poor little Izuku.

“So you sat there and let Bakugou and his friends beat me black and blue… because Hisashi wanted to keep me safe.” It wasn’t a question and the two images fought for dominance in her mind. “Did it ever occur to that you they had a greater chance of killing me than being a pro hero did? That a bunch of kids who didn’t know their own strength, who I had constant exposure to, were more of a danger to me than a job field that had specialised training in countering threats?” They were children. How could they they be more dangerous to Izuku than being a pro hero?

“I didn’t think-”

“-That’s exactly the problem. You *didn’t* think. For years I told you about all of these things. About Bakugou, about the training, about the Quirks, about how not every single part of the job involved taking out villains and you didn’t listen to a single word of it.” It wasn’t… it wasn’t true… “You stopped asking, you stopped caring, because you made it all about what you wanted instead of what I wanted. I was nearly killed by Shigaraki at that shopping mall and you immediately made it about yourself and your feelings,” exploded out of him and without thinking Inko moved to deny it.

“No! That’s not it at all! I wanted to keep you safe!” Away from harm. Away from the suffering that came with that awful work. He was too fragile. Why couldn’t he watch on and not be involved, like everyone else? Why did it have to be him?

“Then why could you intervene for the Camp, but not for Bakugou who spent almost a decade beating me while you watched on and did nothing?” He was standing now, glaring down at her. “You and Bakugou did more damage to me than All For One dreamed of doing and he literally killed me.” The wind was knocked from her lungs. Caught in her throat. Izuku… Izuku had… died? How had he died when he was right here? “Your excuses aren’t good enough.”

“Because Hisashi didn’t want you to be a hero,” finally burst forth from her. “He didn’t and I couldn’t… I couldn’t… tell him no.” And it was out.

“Because it was an arranged marriage, even if it wasn’t a Quirk

marriage and you spent my entire life lying to me for a person who might not even exist." The disgust on his face. The… the disappointment. "You should have said something, anything, but instead you were too cowardly to do it and let Bakugou attempt to beat my dreams out of me because you couldn't bring yourself to say the words." His face hurtled through far too many emotions for Inko to keep up.

"That's not it!"

"Then why can't you tell me what it actually was if I'm not accurate?"

"My little Izuku-"

"-Is gone. He never existed in the first place. You've spent my entire life projecting a lie onto me, then using it as an excuse to look away from real danger that required you to act. All because I didn't have a Quirk, even though your own is functionally useless." Useless. It stung, especially coming from him. A puddle was forming on the dining table. Izuku didn't so much as flinch. "You cried, you didn't move on and I died and you're still doing it right now. Everyone else changed for the better apart from you." How could anyone change for the better with such a terrible event? What was he talking about?

"We just wanted you to be safe!" Inko cried out. "Why don't you understand?" Why didn't he want to be safe and take care of himself? Why wouldn't he give up?

"It's not that I don't understand, it's that you're a hypocrite and I've never cared," he hissed back and Inko shrunk down in her seat. "What gets me more more than anything is that I had the same sort of conversations with All For One, and the serial killer who stole my corpse got it and you don't."

"But…" He didn't mean it. He couldn't mean it.

"You need to talk to a professional, because I'm clearly not getting through… This…" He shook his head. "It's too much." And he left, his footsteps echoing to his room and the door snapped shut.

What had she done wrong?

If being questioned over Shigaraki was stress inducing, then absolutely nothing compared to the hours upon hours of word vomit as Izuku

tried to convey All For One being… himself to the police. It was only after Izuku was offered a therapist four minutes in and one of the detectives hurriedly excused himself that it occurred to Izuku that the police had expectations from a prior source. From Izuku's catchup with Shinsou after the fact, having your stalker attach himself like a sailor to a door from the sinking Titanic, was… illuminating. At least Shinsou had managed to score a trial placement for the Heroics course out of the experience. That saying about clouds and silver linings…

Police were the easy part. Official, understanding, non-judgemental and dripping with professionalism. All Might in the form of Mr Yagi had streamlined police questioning to such an absurd degree that papers could be written on the improved process and the reporting experience for victims of crime. The direct supervision period was almost over and with any luck, the mass of police stationed at his house would disperse with the order. Then again… if Mr Yagi was insisting, Izuku doubted they were brave enough to tell him no.

Everyone else didn't have that training. A bombardment of text messages to his new phone. An invitation to a group chat. Suggestions of therapy. A mountain of gifts at his front door. It was too much. Izuku wanted to slink back to his desk in class and pretend that his absence had been a shockingly out of character period of truancy. It was easier to explain Izuku's own actions than All For One's, but they only wanted answers that Izuku didn't possess because he wasn't All For One. All For One himself struggled with understanding his own motives and if it wasn't for the imminent deaths that were sure to follow, Izuku would've directed them to ask him for themselves. If All Might still had One For All, he would've taken Izuku up on the offer and questioned him with gusto.

It wasn't all of 1-A who were smothering in their desperation to make sure Izuku had survived the experience in one piece. Kacchan's outburst had worked a miracle in having the class back off. In return, Izuku invited himself unannounced to the Bakugou family home where he and Kacchan watched his mother shift gears from dysfunctional to functional within three seconds of opening the door. It was a small detail, but a reprieve for both of them nonetheless.

Todoroki as well remained the same as ever. Without any social skills to comment on the abduction, he elected to stick with the standard topic of heroics and the progress he'd made with his Quirk. Peppered by the involvement of the rest of his family who were happy to walk Izuku through their own lives without ever touching on his own, it was a stark change from the rest of 1-A.

All of the need to know details that Izuku didn't want to endlessly repeat were in the police report… but that wasn't good enough for them. So, Izuku had to keep his distance from 1-A, up to the point where Kacchan's patience snapped like a high tension wire. After that, it wasn't quite back to how it had been, but it was close enough. It was… different. Not necessarily bad, but different. Time might not heal all wounds, but it helped to an extent.

Though, there'd forever be details that Izuku never had any intention of sharing with the police or anyone who wasn't All Might. Details like All For One's form perched at the end of his bed in what was now a familiar, weekly, ritual.

"Hello, Izuku, everything going well?" All For One was unusually cheerful. Izuku would have to make sure that All Might hadn't mysteriously died in his sleep when he woke up from the dream.

Mind drifting backwards to Inko's denials, he winced. "Um." Not his finest or most contained moment, but why did she have to look at him like that? He had dinner with Bakugou's parents and they'd been so painfully well behaved that Izuku half thought he'd dreamed the entire experience.

"That's a no, isn't it?" All For One immediately frowned.

"I was right, by the way," Izuku added offhandedly, watching the Quirk tense. "Definitely an arranged or a Quirk marriage."

Realisation shot across All For One's face. "Oh, so that's what happened. I can't imagine she was terribly receptive to that specific line of questioning." Understatement. Such an understatement. "What gives you that impression?"

"Hisashi gave me that impression," Izuku leaned forwards to rest his chin on his fingers. "Hisashi wants a family, but instead of doing what a normal person does, he pays a desperate, struggling woman off and an orphan no less." Izuku paused. "Conveniently, that meant no one was around to witness exactly how little contact she's had with her supposed husband or indeed, witness him exist at all."

"Rather convenient, yes," All For One vaguely hummed and Izuku was closing in on his answer. Each party to this sordid tale had a tiny piece of the puzzle and it was Izuku's job to piece it all together.

"Hisashi didn't have me because he wanted a kid, did he?" Pointed, from the corner of his eyes, Izuku spotted All For One, a deer trapped

by the headlights of an oncoming b-train. “It was you all along. You arranged the marriage. You arranged the Quirks. You knew I would be Quirkless and therefore helpless when you came to collect.” Completely at All For One’s mercy, had it not been for One For All being the spanner in the works of the original’s plan.

“I knew there was a high possibility of you being Quirkless,” All For One uttered and a great weight lifted itself from Izuku’s shoulders, for of course One For All knew about Izuku when its connected counterpart had engineered Izuku’s birth in the first place. All For One had been stolen from by himself, not All Might. “Hisashi’s original Quirk wasn’t Fire Breathing and even then, Fire Breathing is an understatement of that particular Quirk’s capabilities. Due to the nature of the arrangement, it was always a possibility that you would be Quirkless and it wasn’t one that concerned me at the time.” Chills rippled down Izuku’s neck. “It was better for you, mentally, to not have a Quirk, so I thought at the time…” Which perfectly explained All For One’s frantic attempts to diagnose the origin point of Izuku’s unexplained Quirk. If All For One had been firing Cupid’s arrows from the distance, then just how involved had he been in the selection of the genetic components?

“You were planning on giving me one anyway, weren’t you?” The doctor’s Quirk was always going to be at risk. It was too useful. “He’d already outlived his usefulness, hadn’t he? Doesn’t really pay to have any loyalty to you,” Izuku muttered under his breath. All For One was repaying the doctor’s century plus of loyalty with a slow and agonising death. The doctor was dying, but dying so slowly at All For One’s tender mercies that All For One himself might die of old age before the Quirk was properly released.

“His loyalty was only to an individual who supported all of his agendas,” was fired back. “Your demise was not my agenda and all of his *loyalty*,” All For One sneered out the word, “was undone in that instant. The Noumu were designed to work around this shortcoming of the weak willed. They are to do as they’re told, not what they *think* they were told.” In a comparison that was sure to be unappreciated by both parties, Izuku immediately thought of the previous month when he’d walked in on Kacchan raiding in World of Heroes. “It killed my brother, it killed my son and it nearly killed you.” It also killed Kacchan’s entire raid team numerous times and Izuku aggressively squeezed down a nascent, wholly inappropriate grin at the memory of Kacchan’s keyboard upending.

“All those years of him at your beck and call meant nothing to you.”

The doctor was another tool to him, just like Inko and Hisashi. There was no attachment to the people, only the product.

“All those years were nothing compared to *months* of you.” Now Izuku’s eyes widened and he inched away from All For One who had latched onto his wrist. “Before you there was *nothing*. An empty void that no amount of shovelled in platitudes or insipid pandering could ever fill, because it wasn’t *real*. No rapport, no shared interests, no understanding and then *you* came along and I miss what I had. None of it had any meaning, because none of them were you.”

“Fifteen years-”

“I’m not Inko Midoriya, Izuku. I didn’t have the liberty of secreting you away, because even from a tender age I knew you’d never tolerate me. You worshipped the ground All Might walked on for his natural sense of charity. Why would you ever care about *me*? What could I possibly bring to the table to compete with that?” Grimacing, All For One flexed a hand.

“Since when have you had that level of self awareness?” Izuku muttered under his breath and got a minor shove in response.

“What I’m saying, is that it was far easier to blame All Might’s pervasive media popularity than it was to acknowledge that I should’ve snatched you away far sooner in your lifespan.” Each word edged it’s way out as if Izuku was watching a slow motion, non-pain relieved wisdom tooth extraction. “Had I acted sooner, you wouldn’t have died, but…”

There was that but again. “If you acted sooner, would I exist as I am now?”

“The what ifs are painful, because you’re fine the way you are,” All For One admitted in such a defeated voice and Izuku did a double take. “You’re happy… aren’t you?”

Inclining his head like an owl, Izuku considered the question. “I’m… content, I think. Satisfied.” Happy had an unfamiliar tang to it that didn’t sound quite right in Izuku’s ears.

“But not happy?”

“Are you happy?”

“Point taken.” It was a volatile word and All For One wasn’t even

qualified to be asking the question.

Pausing, Izuku redirected the conversation back to their initial topic. Questions surrounding All For One's capacity to feel regular human emotions weren't currently accounted for by Izuku's pay grade. "What I don't understand is why she had to lie about it." Clenching the blankets between his phantom fingers didn't help his mood.

"Not everyone has the self awareness to realise that they've done something wrong," All For One rolled his eyes and Izuku stared at him. "Yes, that includes me, but unlike Inko, I'm willing to at least discuss it at this point in time. She might never apologise or understand that you're upset with her." That was the biggest risk going into the probing of his mother's "marriage". That she would refuse to admit to any wrongdoing. That All For One was pointing it out made sense when the type of person who'd agree to such a scheme would also be less likely to ever take responsibility for the damage done to the victims. All For One would've chosen his underlings well, had that same behaviour not resulted in a decade of neglect that left All For One seething, as much as he tried to hide it.

"How are people meant to handle these things?" Izuku asked more of himself.

"You don't. If an individual's behaviour is causing you distress, then disengagement from the source is your healthiest option. Don't chase them, because they'll see that as validation of their behaviour." Matter of fact and punctuated with a fond pat on the head. "You're not required to tolerate inconsiderate and hurtful behaviour, even from your parents."

Izuku gawped at All For One. "And yes Izuku, I am attempting to take my own advice, before you ask."

Hell had frozen over and Izuku cleared his throat in attempt to stall for time while his brain computed the exchange that had just occurred. "So why are you really here?" Izuku dumbly asked, while desperately tried to yank his mind away from the very concept of All For One giving life advice.

"I miss you," came the plaintive response.

"I don't see why when you keep showing up here once a week." Every week for the last three months, All For One's Quirk, without fail, stopped by for a chat, a whinge and an unavoidable hug.

“It’s not the same,” All For One insisted. “I get a summary, not all of the little details.” Why All For One cared that much about the details was still a mystery for the ages.

“What I’m hearing is that you want to kidnap me again.” At least that was a lot harder with Kurogiri locked down.

“Not quite,” All For One chirped back and Izuku jumped at the sudden shift in mood. “But what do *you* want, Izuku Midoriya?”

“I want what I’ve always wanted - to go out, to help people and do it without a single person worrying or providing commentary,” Izuku repeated. The exact opposite of his mother’s behaviour.

“You want to be normal, when you’ve always been normal.” Not according to the rest of society.

“I’m about as normal as you,” Izuku snorted. Gaining a Quirk removed only one aspect of how people treated him, but the moment he stopped being useful to them, they’d return to their old ways.

“I am what I am.” All For One rolled his shoulders.

“What you are is an idiot,” Izuku half heartedly shot back. “You were legally dead for six years and could’ve stayed that way it you kept away from All Might. You could’ve faded away and been a nobody.”

“The me from now isn’t the me from then, Izuku,” All For One patted him on the shoulder and Izuku swayed under the weight. “If I ever gain the ability to time travel, I will be sure to act on your sage advice at an earlier point in time.” Then he was gone.

Eyes snapping open, the sun peeking through his curtains, he texted All Might about how his nightshift went and got a cheerful smiley back almost immediately. A double shift, evidently.

Then he noticed it. “Hey, mum,” Izuku frowned at the painfully nondescript cardboard box sitting at the end of his bed. “Where did this box come from?”

“Your father sent it!” His mother’s tense voice echoed from around the corner. “As soon as he heard you were back, he had it delivered.” After three months? Hisashi must’ve existed within a pocket dimension that operated on a different timescale to the rest of them.

The first layer wasn’t particularly exciting. Shirts from Izuku’s usual

place, with *HERO*, *VILLAIN* and *MORALLY AMBIGUOUS VIGILANTE* stamped across them. Strangely specific, but Izuku had weirder and more wonderful shirts.

The second layer was matching pairs of summer and winter socks that went straight into the sock drawer.

The third layer was an All Might hoodie that Izuku hadn't seen before, neatly folded with an eye watering price tag in USD still attached and included 1st edition card that was tucked into its folds. Considerate, yes, but Inko must've told him what was missing from Izuku's collection.

The fourth layer was a book titled *The History of Quirks by Hisashi Midoriya* and Izuku's eyes nearly dropped out of his skull. Flicking through the chapters, Izuku found a compendium of Quirks across every category, every theme, neatly arranged by type and sub-type. Right at the back, with a chapter of its own was All For One, in all its glory and Izuku heard a ghostly chortle from deep within. Of course All For One would pick a person who'd written a book waxing poetic about the Quirk of the man himself. Vain to the very end.

At the final layer, Izuku's hands hit a soft and familiar object, his mind flailing as it was launched back through space and time. It was the scrapbook prepared by All For One. Each page carefully collected to fill in the gaps of Izuku's missing six months of life… But… Izuku flicked through and the pages… were full. Photos, handwritten notes in the same script that was on All Might's hospital hamper, dates, times and detailed observations. What Izuku liked to wear, his favourite news roundups, his favourite Quirks with source location included in a manner that perfectly matched *The History of Quirks* (Izuku trembled), the arrest of Vlad King, the memorial service… Everything that had happened since Izuku's first death up to now was captured in excruciating detail.

All the air left Izuku's lungs on the final page. A selfie of All For One, shamelessly latched onto Izuku who was buried in his chest in the same clothes he'd worn in the dream. A selfie from the dream Izuku had prior to Bakugou discovering him in the bedroom upon his return.

A dream that apparently hadn't been at dream at all.

The weekly visits… that also weren't dreams.

His breath quickened and a piece of paper at the base of the photo flopped open and familiar handwriting crept along the page.

Hello Izuku!

Please enjoy this care package. It contains a selection of some of your favourites, but we both know that imitation is no replacement for the real deal.

I'll see you very soon.

Love,
Hisashi

P.S. I've spoken to your mother about your concerns. It's a work in progress.

Without thinking, Izuku rang All Might, hefted the box under an arm and bolted from the room.

Mid-flight, a familiar voice struck Izuku's ears. "It's been such a long time since I last saw him."

Izuku's heart froze in his chest and without a single thought he launched himself out of the nearest window.

Chapter End Notes

Happy New Year!

Finally we come to the end of Cardiac Arrest. This long ride is finally over and thank you to all of those who made it to the finish. No sequel is planned for this work.

So who called it? And what is the "it" that you called? Some food for thought for those wondering about the ending: https://archiveofourown.org/comments/608108749

(Typos will be fixed at some point as always.)

End Notes

Just a fun idea...

If anyone wants to have a gab at what else we do, please check out our blog: https://davidschmellingart.blogspot.com/2021/01/howl-joined-food-for-crows-team.html

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!